

A STRANGER THINGS FANFIC

No One Like You

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No One Like You by **melissawtf**

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Summary: Dani Lewis was meant to live her life as normal as possible until her dad decided to move them again. She wasn't supposed to find another child experiment, she wasn't supposed to fight monsters, and she definitely wasn't supposed to fall for the bad boy in a blue Camaro. Some things were just inevitable it seems.

1. Teen Idle

Author's Note: I love Stranger Things, but since I was raised in the 90's it's hard for me to get in the head space in order to write for the 80's. With that said there are going to be some things in here that weren't available in the 80's. Just go with it.

Here is a short list of semi-important things to expect from this story:

- [] Face claims: Kaylee Bryant as Danielle Lewis and Luke Evans as Nathan Lewis.
- [] As much as I tried to keep Billy "in character", he ended up being "out of character". I guess that's what I get for writing a Billy/OC story. Smh.
- [] Timeline will be skewed. This story will start **post S2**- during summer vacation right before Jonathan, Steve, and Billy start their Senior year of HS.
- [] Some S3 elements will be present (*cough*lifeguardBilly*cough*).
- [] I know some writers like writing scenes word for word as they appeared in the show, but not me. Some particular scenes may even be out of order, jsyk.

Teen Idle

The wasted years, the wasted youth
The pretty lies, the ugly truth
And the day has come where I have died
Only to find, I've come alive

Danielle, or Dani as she liked to be called, was used to being the new girl in town ever since her father picked up and moved them around since she was fourteen years of age. Hawkins, Indiana is now the fourth place she is to call home and she finds she quite likes the quaint little town. She just wishes that the apparently newly opened mall on the outskirts of town didn't kill the family businesses in town that were in desperate need of funds.

It was the summer before she was to start her Senior year of high school and since her dad had immediately started working as a

deputy for the local police station, it was up to Dani to get their four bedroom house in order and keep herself busy. She does so, within the first week they've moved to Hawkins, and her dad leaves her just enough money to enjoy some time either at the mall, the local arcade, or even at the local pool. And though she wasn't originally a fan of the mall taking away much needed funds from in-town store owners, she chose to explore the mall first.

So throwing her hair up into a messy, yet stylish top knot, Dani pulls on a white Journey band tee over her head. White-washed jean shorts are then pulled up her legs and a black belt is tied around her waist before she steps into a pair of black Converse that have seen better days. And after making sure she has enough money to keep herself busy, and her phone tucked into her back pocket, Dani goes outside and fires up the engine to her black Pontiac Firebird.

Starcourt Mall is apparently a big deal, especially amongst the teens, and Dani relishes walking around the cool air inside rather than the blistering heat outside. The mall consisted of two floors and she immediately took the escalator upstairs to browse. There is a movie theater showing a few new films and since she has a lot of time to kill she figures she'll watch *The Goonies*. The poster looked interesting enough, but first she was going to purchase all the snacks and the largest soda she could carry.

Sitting alone in the theater momentarily makes her feel uncomfortable, but then a group of rowdy boys and a lone red headed girl take the seats next to her in the same aisle she'd chosen. Only one of the boys, the one who sits right next to her, has enough manners to smile apologetically. His shy and quiet persona makes Dani smile at him, and she shakes a box of *Sugar Babies* at him.

"Want some?" The boy sheepishly shakes his head. "It's okay. I seriously got too much candy, popcorn, and soda. I'm gonna rot my teeth if I don't share with someone, kid. You can even have some popcorn if you want."

That seems to do the trick and the boy cups his hands for some of the candy. He hesitantly reaches for the popcorn once he transfers the candy into one hand and Dani nudges it closer to him. "I'm Will," he quietly introduces himself.

"Dani," she grins in reply. "Me and my dad just moved to Hawkins."

"Oh cool. I'm from Hawkins too. We all are actually," he says while gesturing to his friends who are now staring suspiciously at them. When Will sees it, he huffs. "Guys, this is Dani. She's new to Hawkins. Dani, this is Mike, Lucas, and Max."

"Hey," Dani nods at every child staring at her. "Uh, you guys want some popcorn? I can only eat so much of it."

The kids stare at one another before shrugging, the one named Lucas reaching over and snagging the bucket to share with everyone else.

"Sorry about them," Will mutters.

"It's fine."

The movie soon starts and Dani quiets down, she watching the movie and laughing at all the right places. The kids next to her laugh uproariously at times and their laughter only incites hers even more. And by the end of the movie, Will's friends appear at ease with her and manage to get out of her that she's to attend Hawkins High when the school year starts back up. Mike tells her that his sister is going to be a Junior, but that her new boyfriend Jonathan and her ex-boyfriend Steve are going to be Seniors with her.

"My stepbrother will be a senior too," Max informs her. "If you run into a guy named Billy Hargrove just know that he's not exactly the nicest person to befriend."

Dani nods. "Good looking out, kid."

She expects them to go their separate ways, but Max nudges her and then drags her to the Scoops Ahoy Ice Cream Parlour. There's a teen girl standing at the register and upon seeing Mike and his friends, she sighs.

The girl, *Robin* her name tag reads, briefly meets Dani's gaze and the way Lucas is trying to play it cool at her side before subtly shaking her head clear and looking over her shoulder. "Hey, dingus, your children are here! And they brought fresh meat."

Dani scoffs, even as Robin grins at her, and the window at the back wall slides open. A teen boy stands there, in the same ridiculous outfit Robin is wearing. "Again? Seriously!" Mike shrugs and Dani snorts, earning the new guy's attention. "Who are you?"

"Steve, this is Dani. Dani, that's Steve," Mike quickly says. "Now come on, idiot. We want our ice cream."

Steve groans and Robin smiles, she and him switching jobs. Steve reluctantly starts taking their orders and Dani waits to place her own after they pay.

"Can I, uh, can I have the strawberry swirl in a waffle cone please?"

Steve nods and quickly prepares her cone, she paying and then dropping the change into the tip jar. That seems to earn her a genuine smile from him. "So.. you're new, huh?" He asks, casually leaning against the counter and pulling off his sailor's hat to adorably ruffle his hair.

Dani hears a scoff and looks up to find Robin rolling her eyes at Steve's back. Fighting off a smirk, Dani licks her ice cream. "Yeah. Just got in like last week or something. Finally got the freedom to explore."

"Cool, cool," Steve nods. "So have you graduated or..?"

"Senior. One last year and then I can finally do my own thing."

"Oh. Nice!" Steve says, eyes gleaming with just how happy that apparently made him. "I'm going to be a senior too."

A moment passes and then with her most deadpan expression, Dani says, "Yay." Robin guffaws from her place in the back and Steve tries not to glare over his shoulder. Her amusement eventually wins out, and Dani starts to laugh and then apologize. "Sorry. I'm sorry. That was dick-ish of me. I kind of already knew you'd be a senior since the kids filled me in on who was who after our movie finished."

More people enter the shop and Dani starts backing away from the front counter before Steve can try to make any more conversation. She weakly waves her goodbye as Steve and Robin suddenly become

swamped with orders, and then turns to meet the rather amused stares of the kids.

"That was a total set up. I only met you and I already hate you." The kids laugh, shrugging unabashedly.

"Steve needs more friends his own age," Lucas informs her. "Ever since Nancy dumped his sorry ass he's leaned on a bunch of Junior High kids and has become rather mopey."

"He didn't seem mopey to me."

"Yeah because a hot girl talked to him," Mike muses.

Dani chokes and then laughs, she trying to hide her smile as Max threatens to tell Mike's girlfriend about him calling another girl hot. "Thanks for the compliment, and in order to keep you out of trouble with the girlfriend, I'm just gonna get going. Thanks for not letting me be a loser and sitting alone in the theater."

"No problem."

"Uh huh. Bye!" The kids all inform her.

Dani finishes her ice cream as she walks out of the mall, she silently groaning as the heats envelops her once more. It's still rather early, but she needs to come up with a dinner idea, shop for groceries, and then have it cooked and ready for when her dad gets off of work.

Day one out and about in Hawkins proved to be quite fun, and Nathan Lewis was glad to hear about his daughter's day. He spoke more of his co-workers down at the Police Station and how they were a breath of fresh air compared to previous co-workers of his. Dani was glad her dad seemed at ease in this new town and it felt like a weight had been lifted off her shoulders, but of course things just had to go wrong just as it felt like they could stop looking around the corner.

Dani sleeps in the day after exploring, she tiredly making herself some lunch before taking the longest shower ever in order to fully wake herself up. Then with her dark hair finger combed into a messy

ponytail, Dani dons a plain white crop top that fits snug against her upper torso under a pair of denim overalls that have been cut into shorts. She pairs it with white sneakers and a pair of round sunglasses to keep the annoying sun from bothering her. Then after scouring her vanity and the vanity's drawers for some loose change, Dani finds enough quarters and dollar bills to keep her busy at the local arcade.

The local arcade itself is rather stuffy, but that was pretty much expected given the numerous machines buzzing around her. Dani quickly pulls free the dollar bills and heads for the change exchange, only to find it out of order and a note taped to it to see whoever was on shift at the time for change.

Dani tracks the lone arcade worker down and the teen with oily skin, dark hair down to his shoulders, and a knack for wiping his Cheeto encrusted fingers on his shirt eagerly exchanges the five dollar bills for quarters for her. Keith is his name and Dani mentally remarks to steer clear of this Keith guy less she end up with orange streaks on her white shirt. The guy is clearly happy to see a girl such as herself in his place of work, but all Dani wants to do is waste some time beating people's high scores and not entertain any boys.

Dani's on her last five quarters when someone bumps into her back, her glower immediately vanishing upon the sight of familiar red hair. Max chuckles at her expression, she then nudging a young brunette at her side.

"El, this is Dani. Dani, this is Eleven. She's Mike's girlfriend."

"Oh. Hey! Nice to meet you," Dani says. "I met your friends yesterday at the movies."

"Pretty," the girl says. Max snorts and nudges her, and Eleven blushes as she seems to blink out of whatever dreamy state she'd been in. "Sorry. It's just-"

"I'm pretty?" Dani muses. "Thanks. It's nice to know people appreciate my prettiness."

"Oh god. Shut up." Max rolls her eyes and Eleven nervously chuckles, Dani then winking at the girl to show her she's not bothered at all by

the compliment. "So what games do you play?" Max asks.

Dani shrugs and turns back to the room at large. "Galaga is my jam. I beat the high score on it, so expect some nerd to whine about it sooner or later."

"Yeah? Well I hold the high score on Dig Dug. Even beat out my friend Dustin who complained for like a week straight."

"Well maybe I should avenge him and take you out of that spot." Dani laughs. "I still got a few quarters to spend."

The two young girls follow Dani, they watching as the elder teen spends the last of her money on Dig Dug. The game is not one she particularly enjoys, so it takes her a couple of tries to really get the hang of it and when she does.. Max starts the trash talking.

Eleven is laughing as they trade insults back and forth, and then the young red headed girl is whooping in delight when Dani's last life is taken by the alien-lookin' dinosaur forty points before she could beat Max's high score.

"Yes! Still number one!"

Dani smirks as she enters her name into the high score list. "Man that Dustin kid is gonna be really pissed I pushed him out of the number two slot."

Eleven nods. "So pissed."

"Alright, kiddos. Bathroom break." Dani claps her hands, looking around for the bathroom in question.

"This way."

Dani is surprised when Eleven grasps her by the hand, the young girl leading her to the girl's bathroom as Max chooses to remain with the games. Eleven had seemed quiet and reserved, and Dani didn't think the girl had liked her, but apparently she does. So after entering one of the stalls to do her business, Dani then exits and heads for the sinks to wash her hands.

On her left wrist sits a braided leather cuff bracelet with a feather charm that only comes off when she showers, washes dishes, or washes her hands. She hasn't thought twice about unclasping it and setting it aside in such a long time, so she's quite shocked that when half way through lathering up her hands with soap Eleven reaches out with lightning quick reflexes and snatches her wrist up in her hand.

"..sister?"

"Excuse me?" Dani frowns as she tries to tug her wrist free, something in her chest tightening at the way Eleven is staring at the **009** tattooed on her wrist that she's kept hidden since she was fourteen. "El, let go."

She does after a moment of hesitance and Dani's brief anger is washed away when Eleven meets her gaze. Her eyes are filled with tears threatening to fall. "Sister."

"Uhh.." Dani is then struck speechless as Eleven thrusts her own left arm out, turning it over and yanking up her sleeve to show her own tattoo. **011**. Dani's eyes widen and bile burns at the back of her throat. "Oh. *Sister*."

Eleven nods, a smile breaking out as she wipes away her tears. "Come on. We need to see Hopper."

2. Young God

Young God

*And I've been sitting at the bottom of a swimming pool
For a while now, drowning my thoughts out with the sounds
But do you feel like a young god?
You know the two of us are just young gods*

Dani's in a daze as Eleven grabs her bracelet off the sink and tosses it at her, the younger girl then dragging her out of the bathroom as Dani shoves her bracelet in her pocket. Dani's mind seems to be in a fog until she feels her left wrist being turned over and Max's exclamation of *holy shit* snaps her out of it. Dani's freaked out expression then meets Max's astonished one, the red head then smoothing out her expression to one of acceptance and understanding.

"Hey. It's fine," Max says. "There's a group of us that know about Eleven. If you're like her, they'll be just as supportive of you. We've never actually met another like her."

"E-Eleven?" Dani frowns. "You let them call you by your designation from *them*?"

She shrugs. "My name is Jane, but I didn't find out until after. I'm used to Eleven, but they all call me El. It's nice."

Shakily breathing, Dani leans against the wall and places her hands on her knees. "This is not happening. This can't be happening," she mumbles.

Max quietly groans and rolls her eyes. "You're freaking out over nothing. Just go see Hopper. He'll explain everything. You don't have to worry about anymore scientists or doctors. That's all been taken care of."

"W-What?"

"We need to see Hopper," Eleven says again. "Trust me."

"Who the hell even is this Hopper person?" Dani wonders, her voice a little pitchy as she stands tall once more.

"The Chief of Police. He's El's legal guardian now."

Dani looks at Max in surprise, then to Eleven who's smiling and nodding. "You know what? Fine. Fine," she says again while clearing her throat. "My dad works at the police station too. Lets just go and get this over with."

"As much as I want to see and hear everything, my step brother should be picking me up soon," Max says as she trails after them. "Promise you'll tell me everything?"

Eleven happily agrees as Dani worries her bottom between her teeth, she putting her sunglasses back on to shield the uncertainty warring in her eyes. Max is still trailing after them as Dani heads towards her car, and a car honking just several yards away startles her. Max scoffs and mumbles something about her idiot step brother, and Dani chances a look at the blue Camaro's driver. The first thing she notices is the smoke wafting from the guy's mouth as he hangs out the driver's side window, cigarette dangling from between his fingers, and his lips twitching into a smile as he lays on the horn until Max yells at him.

Dani rolls her eyes behind her sunglasses. "What a charmer."

"Don't let him hear you say that," Max grumbles. "He'll take it as invite into your shorts." Dani flips the guy off when she finally makes it to her car, her lips twitching against her better judgement as his laugh rings out loud enough for her to hear. "Anyway," Max says. "I should really go before he gets mean. I want to know everything tomorrow."

"Sure. Hopefully I'm still here by tomorrow." The younger girls go quiet and Dani glances at them. Shoulders dropping, she quickly explains. "My dad's really protective. Anything that has to deal with.. you know," she mutters and flashes them her tattooed wrist, "freaks him out. He'll want to put as much distance between me and them."

Before they can assure her that everything is going to be okay, an

engine revving stops them. Tires screech and then Max's step brother's car slams to a halt right in front of them. "Hurry the hell up, Max. I got shit to do other than waiting on you." Max sighs with a roll of her eyes, she giving up and stomping towards the passenger seat of his car. His gaze darts towards Dani, his smirk coming back in full force. "Hey. I'm Billy."

"And I really don't care." His smirk only widens in response and Max's wary expression morphs into confusion at his amusement. Dani quickly unlocks her car, she sparing the red head one last look. "Bye, Max. Eleven will tell you everything tomorrow if I can't." The red head quickly nods as she buckles herself in, her step brother peeling out in the parking lot before driving off. Dani frowns after the blue car, dropping into the driver's seat of her own car before leaning over to unlock the door for Eleven. Or Jane. She wasn't really sure what to call her, but it seemed the girl actually preferred her numbered name.

Then once situated and making sure the younger girl is buckled in, Dani starts her Firebird and guns it out of the parking lot.

The police station comes into view not even five minutes later and once again Dani feels as if she's in a daze. She and Eleven make their way into the station and the receptionist happily greets them, but before the girls can say anything Nathan Lewis is intercepting them.

"Dani? Is everything okay?" Nathan glances between the girls and the receptionist, he telling the receptionist that he'd take it from there while escorting the girls aside.

"Uh. Yeah, dad. We, uh, we need to speak with Hopper. He's.. Jane's legal guardian or so I'm told."

Nathan glances down at the girl by his daughter's side, he rubbing at the scruff on his face with a sigh. "Jeez, Dani. What happened?"

"Not here, dad. Please."

Nathan seems to see something in his daughter's expression, his own expression tightening before nodding. "Follow me." Nathan leads them to the Chief's office, he knocking twice on the open door before

letting the girls enter first.

Jim Hopper glances up with a smile, said smile vanishing when he sees his charge. "What's going on?"

"This." Eleven thrusts her arm out, wrist up and tattoo for all to see.

"Jesus, kid. What the hell?!" Hopper jumps up to his feet just as Nathan inhales sharply. "What did I say about-"

Dani thrusting her own arm out hesitantly cuts Hopper off, his eyes immediately zeroing in on Dani's own tattoo. "Hi. I'm **Nine**."

"Dani!" Nathan scolds.

"Wait. What?" Hopper glances between the three occupants of his office.

"We're leaving. Now." Nathan grabs his daughter by the arm, he turning and dragging her with him.

But just before he can get anywhere near the door with Dani in tow, the door slams shut and the blinds fall to cover the windows. "Please don't," Eleven quietly muses.

Dani and Nathan whirl around, but it's Dani who asks, "Did you just..?"

Chief Hopper groans as he falls back into his seat, he reaching for the tissues on the corner of his desk and tossing them to Eleven whose nose is bleeding. "Jane has.. an array of abilities. We're still learning what she can do, but the more prominent power of hers is telekinesis."

"Jesus," Nathan breathes in awe. Or horror. Dani's not too sure. She glances at her dad and when she sees that he's not going to bolt, she walks closer to Eleven. And seeing as his daughter isn't as freaked as he expected, Nathan takes a seat across from his boss. "Okay. So.. you're either laying down low like us or you and your daughter made a deal."

Hopper scoffs, not bothering to correct the daughter comment. "There

had been a deal, but the CIA didn't keep up their end of the bargain. All you need to know is that Project MKUltra is over and done with for good. You and your daughter don't have to look over your shoulders anymore."

Nathan's shoulders droop and Dani exhales shakily. "Is it really over?" Nathan asks, staring at his daughter as several emotions war over her features.

"Yeah." Hopper leans back in his chair, taking a moment to gather his thoughts. "Before you ran, did you know what their end goal was?"

"They mentioned something about opening a door," Dani mutters quietly. "But I- my powers weren't useful to them."

"Well apparently *Eleven's* were," he says. All eyes dart to Eleven and she shrinks under their gazes. "Since her powers deal with the mind, they put her through some cruel experiments where she ended up making contact with a creature from another dimension. No one knew at the time, but Eleven making contact with it opened up a portal."

"No fuckin' way."

"Dani," Nathan quickly scolds. "Language."

Hopper's lip twitch. "Anyway.. Jane was able to defeat the main monster that came through, but in doing so it sucked her into that dimension until she found her own way out hours later. A new scientist was appointed leader of the project, but he didn't condone experimentation on children. In fact, all he wanted to do was study Jane and a boy who'd been kidnapped by a monster to see what being in that place did to their bodies."

"But I hid. Hopper helped hide me." Eleven then looks to Dani. "I ended up running away and I met another of our sisters. She had **008** tattooed on her. She could manipulate what you saw- make it seem like something was there when it wasn't."

Dani's eyes widen. "Is she around? Did she-"

"I left her too. She and her friends used her powers for bad things. I

couldn't stay, so I came home."

"And it was a good thing she did," Hopper picks back up. "Apparently the CIA continued messing with the gate that led to the dimension the kids dubbed the Upside Down, and that world started leaking into ours. More monsters came and we had to fight all over again."

"Is this place even safe?" Nathan huffs. "I moved here expecting a fresh start for a couple years before we up and moved again."

"It's safe. Eleven closed the gate for good and I had a friend in the government that I contacted to look into the laboratory that had been doing the experiments. Those who weren't killed by the monsters were taken into custody and the government weeded out everyone else. The lab has been shut down and hasn't been messed with since. Trust me, I'd know. I check up on it every now and then." Dani shifts uncomfortably, her gaze darting between her dad and Chief Hopper. When her dad doesn't have anything else to say, Hopper looks at her. "So what are your capabilities, if you don't mind me asking."

"Oh." Her gaze darts to her dad once more, he sighing and shrugging as if telling her to go ahead and tell them. "I can manipulate and travel through shadows."

"No shit?"

"No shit." Dani flashes the Chief a small smile at her father's noise of indignation and a moment later the lights in the room dim. Hopper's eyes widen, even more so when he glances to the corner of his office where it seems far darker than it should be. Dani walks over to it, placing her back to the shadow before walking backwards and disappearing into it.

"What? Where'd she go?"

Eleven's eyes dart all over the room, she noticing a spot on the wall behind Hopper getting darker. Dani steps through, smile widening as she taps Hopper on the shoulder and he jerks in his seat. Eleven's eyes sparkle in wonder.

Nathan's lips quirk, but before anything can be said about his

daughter he's speaking out. "I want to see this laboratory for myself. I want to know that it's been shut down and that Dani doesn't have to worry."

A moment passes and then the Chief is agreeing. "Sure. Yeah. Lets go." He looks to Eleven, but Eleven's still staring at Dani. "Uh, do you think you can keep an eye on her?" He asks of Dani, gesturing to the younger girl who's staring at her with adoration in her eyes.

"Oh. Yeah. That's fine. I'm sure she wants to know more about my past and what not."

"Thanks."

"And I'll fill you in on our experience with these people." Nathan sighs, taking a stand. "Lets go, boss. This almost sounds too good to be true."

Chief Hopper leads the way out of his office, Nathan trailing after him and the girls behind them. An excuse is given to the receptionist for Hopper and Nathan's sudden urge to leave, and Dani takes Eleven back to her car.

As soon as they're buckled in and on the road to Dani's house, the older girl asks, "So what do you want to know?"

"Were you born with your powers like me?"

"No. My mother gave birth to a normal baby girl, but she bled out before the doctor's could stop it. My father attempted to take care of me, but the death of my mother made him lose his mind for a bit," she admits with a frown, concentrating on the streets she's driving down. "The State ended up taking over custody of me and from there that's where things get complicated. There was an apparent mix-up and I got sent to a new family facility instead of the actual baby they wanted. Only instead of a family facility, they sent me to a lab where they injected me with all sorts of serums and drugs, and my powers came to be that way."

"How did you get away?"

"My dad actually," she chuckles. "Long story short, once he got his act

together and realized his baby girl wasn't actually his baby girl he hired a detective of sorts. They looked into my time under the care of the State and any other babies that had been adopted out or sent to a different facility. They tracked me down, loaded up on some blackmail to make lots of threats with, and since my powers weren't worthy of the lab's time they gave me up without a fight."

Eleven frowns. "You were lucky."

"I guess. They kept an eye on me though, to make sure we didn't talk or that my powers didn't grow into something more useful. My dad got tired of it and we started moving around a year later after I had turned fourteen."

The girls fall into a comfortable silence on the rest of the drive to Dani's house, Dani then leading Eleven into her domain. The younger girl seems uncomfortable, but Dani tries to put her at ease as much as she can.

After passing her a can of Coke, Dani asks, "So who all knows about you? About the monsters and everything."

"Max, Mike, Lucas, Dustin, Will."

"So basically all the kids I met at the movies?"

"Yes. Will was the boy who got kidnapped and then possessed," Eleven tells her. "His mom and brother know too- Joyce and Jonathan. Mike's sister Nancy knows and Steve too."

"The ice cream guy at the mall?" Eleven nods. "Aw. He was cute." The younger girl chuckles and they lapse into silence once more, Dani letting her mind go crazy with the thoughts that she and her dad might actually be in the clear now.

A few minutes pass and then Eleven's asking, "So can I tell Max and the others now?"

Chuckling softly, Dani gestures to the phone hanging on the wall. "Sure, kid. Go nuts." Eleven immediately stands to start making phone calls. "But please no visitors today. I have a lot to wrap my mind around and just want to unwind."

"Okay."

Her first phone call is to Mike and Dani grins as she hears the exclamation of surprise through the phone's speaker.

Dear Lord. She was going to have a lot of insistent little assholes banging down her door and it was going to be all her fault.

3. Here I Go Again

Author's Note: We finally get to the good stuff! And by good stuff I mean Billy as a lifeguard ;)

Here I Go Again

*I don't know where I'm goin'
But I sure know where I've been
Hanging on the promises in the songs of yesterday
And I've made up my mind
I ain't wasting no more time*

Nathan Lewis was so relieved to see the abandoned laboratory and the gate Eleven had closed with his own two eyes that he had Chief Hopper take him home immediately afterward. Hopper had watched as the man practically sprinted into his own home, leaving the door wide open in his wake. And when Hopper entered the house a few moments later, he found Eleven smiling as father hugged daughter and sobbed with relief.

Hopper had given Nathan the rest of the day off and took Eleven home, and Dani was treated to a father/daughter night. The two stayed up late watching films and just basking in their newly found peace, so it was no surprise Dani or Nathan slept in the following day.

"Dani. Hey, Dani, wake up. You've got a bunch of youngsters eager to speak with you."

She hums as she rolls over, stretching as she tiredly blinks up at her dad. "Wha..?"

"Eleven spilled the beans, kiddo," he smiles down at her. "I figured I'd go into work and get some paperwork done while you entertain your new admirers."

"Joy." Dani yawns before sitting up and then crawls out of bed. Stumbling over to her dresser, she rummages through the drawers and finds herself a change of clothes. "Tell them to make themselves

comfortable while I shower. They should be fine on their own for a bit."

Nathan snorts. "Too late. Some curly haired kid with weird teeth made a beeline for the refrigerator as soon as Eleven- er, Jane- made herself comfortable at the kitchen table."

Dani chuckles as her dad subconsciously touches his teeth, she shaking her head in amusement. "Well okay then." Clothes in hand, she starts making her way towards her bathroom. "Tell them I'll be down soon. And play nice with the kid with weird teeth."

Mr. Lewis chuckles as he takes his leave from her room, he then finishing up changing into his uniform. After heading back downstairs to inform the misfit group of children of his daughter's delay, he watches on in amusement as every kid has already made themselves comfortable without his prompting. Several of them have drinks in hand from his refrigerator and the curly haired one has the audacity to compliment him on his choice of sandwich meats before taking a bite out of a sandwich he'd apparently made himself.

Snorting, Nathan tells them all to stay out of trouble before taking his leave. And fifteen minutes later, Dani joins them and she's treated to smiles all around.

"So are you really like El?" Lucas asks, eager to know anything and everything. Max, sitting at his side, rolls her eyes.

"Yep. Different powers though." Dani glances around the room, she smiling and nodding at those she remembers until she lands on the only unfamiliar face she's yet to meet. "Hi. I'm Dani."

The kid smiles.. and then purrs. "Hey. I'm Dustin." His friends and Dani all crack up, the boy having absolutely no shame in his game. As Dani looks to Will who's smiling a bit bashfully, Dustin elbows Mike. "Dude, you didn't tell me she was hot!"

Max scoffs. "Boys are such idiots."

"And it's sad to say they don't get better with age," Dani mumbles.

As the group settles back down and make themselves comfortable

again in the living room, they have Dani tell her story from beginning to end. Eleven is there to hold her hand as Dani talks about her own time in a lab and the experiments they conducted on her, and they listen with rapt attention as she explains her powers.

Needless to say, Dustin is the one to ask if she can pull someone into the shadows with her. Dani shrugs and Dustin volunteers himself as her first victim. The kids start getting excited about the possibility of moving through the shadows, so Dani instructs them to make the house a little darker to make things easier for her. They do and the kids are struck speechless as Dani gathers the shadows around her. She grasps Dustin's hands within her own, ignoring the waggle of his eyebrows that send the other boys into a fit of giggles. Then from one moment to the next, Dani walks them into what appears to be a black hole on the wall in the living room and reappears in the upstairs hallway.

"Holy shit!" Dustin exclaims, running towards the upstairs banister that overlooks the living room. "You guys gotta try this!"

One by one, Dani travels with each kid through the shadows. She takes a break after every other kid because travelling with a passenger is pretty new to her, and before the kids leave for the night they make sure to jot down Dani's personnel cell number in case they ever need to get a hold of her.

After a few tiring, kid filled days, Dani decides to take a day for herself thereafter. She sleeps in nearly to noon and then makes herself a late lunch. The heat isn't too unbearable when she chances a trip to the supermarket, so after making a call to her dad to let him know where she's going to be Dani digs out her bikini. She puts it on underneath her clothes, packs a bag of snacks, and drives to the local pool.

When Dani gets to the pool, she shoulders her tote bag and heads to pay her entrance fee. She smiles at the rambunctious kids playing in the pool, smiles at all the house mom's primping in their lounge chairs, and then finds herself her own chair just a ways down from the elder women. From her spot she can hear them chatting and giggling, and realizes with a secretive smile that they're primping for

some hot lifeguard who's about to start their shift.

As Dani places her tote bag on the chair and rummages through it for a scrunchie, she then finger combs her hair into a topknot. She kicks off her flip-flops and shimmies out of her jean shorts which leave her in her black high waist bottoms with white polka dots all over them. And just as her hands go to the hem of her shirt to drag it up and over her head, the house mom's giggling and greeting someone catches her attention.

The lifeguard they'd been waiting for is here and Dani has got to hand it to them- the house mom's have good taste. A tan, fit bod is on display with red shorts hanging low on his hips and doing the guy wonders. But as Dani's gaze travels up to his face, an almost all too familiar face behind the dark shades, the corners of her mouth fall into a frown.

"Aw hell."

Billy Hargrove is staring right at her, smirking. The smug moron saunters right up to her chair after greeting the ogling house mom's, and Dani just knows that his eyes are looking her up and down behind the safety of his sunglasses. "Danielle Lewis," he drawls. "Or should I call you Dani?"

Her eyes roll. "Bully that out of your sister, did you?"

"Step-sister," he corrects, eyebrow twitching. Dani merely raises an eyebrow back at him in response. "And can you blame me? It's not every day a kid like Max hangs out with an older girl like you. I had to make sure you weren't a perv."

"Mhmm. Keep telling yourself that to make yourself feel better about asking about me." Without further ado, Dani strips out of her shirt and lets it fall onto her chair, she fixing the straps to her red halter neck bikini top that tied at the back of her neck. She notices Billy is still standing right next to her, his face angled a little more downward than before. She glances down at herself and huffs when she sees what he must be staring at. Her cleavage. "Hey, idiot, eyes up top."

"Oh believe me. I'm looking *up top*." He smirks again and Dani can't help it. She snorts in amusement.

Billy is momentarily surprised that she didn't chew him out, but he quickly schools his expression into something akin to his earlier arrogant persona. Dani then shakes her head at him. "You're funny, I'll give you that. Now stop ogling the goods and go plant your ass in the lifeguard chair. According to the house mom's who perfected their hair and make-up before you got out here, you're on the clock."

"Aw. Jealous already, Lewis? This bodes well for me."

"In your dreams, Hargrove. Now get to work. You're wasting my precious tanning time."

Somehow Billy manages to saunter backwards, he never taking his gaze off of Dani. She flips him off before moving her clothes and bag aside, she then sitting on the lounge chair and reclining into a relaxed position.

- X -

Dani's lounging quite peacefully in her chair, the noise of the locals having fun oddly soothing her. She can feel herself dozing off, she then jerking when someone touches her shoulder.

Eyes snapping open, Dani pushes up her sunglasses into her hairline as stares up at a woman. She recognizes her as one of the house mom's ogling Billy earlier. "Sorry to disturb you, sweetie, but I just wanted to warn you that if you don't turn over soon you're going to burn."

"Oh. Thanks!" Dani's quick to get up, she smiling at the woman before she rearranges her chair to lay it out flat. Seeing as the woman is still there, she takes the moment to introduce herself. "I'm Dani, by the way. Me and my dad just moved here recently."

"Karen Wheeler," the woman then says.

Dani's brow furrows. "Wheeler. You wouldn't happen to have a son named Mike, would you?"

Mrs. Wheeler sighs. "What'd he do now?"

Dani laughs, shaking her head as she lays out on her stomach on the chair, angling her head towards the older woman. "Nothing bad I assure you. My first day exploring ended up with me at Starcourt mall. He and his friends saved me from sitting alone at the movies, and then they attempted to set me up with some guy named Steve who was dressed like an adorable sailor."

Mrs. Wheeler rolls her eyes, chuckling. "That sounds like my boy." Dani grins in response. "So does that mean you're my daughter's age? Nancy will be a Junior this year."

"Close. I'll be a Senior."

"Oh. How lovely."

Mrs. Wheeler surprisingly takes a seat next to Dani, the woman casually reclining in her chair as Dani lays out to get some sun on her back. They talk a little bit more, the conversation mostly being carried by Dani as she speaks of where she previously lived, where her dad is currently working, and what she plans to do before school starts back up. Mrs. Wheeler offers the companionship of her daughter, but Dani politely refuses to have her force her daughter to hang out with the new kid.

"You know he can't keep your gaze off you, right?"

"Excuse me?"

Mrs. Wheeler smirks and leans her head back against her chair, shielding her eyes with a sun visor she had placed atop her head. "Billy the lifeguard."

Huffing, Dani looks towards the lifeguard's chair and crosses her arms beneath her chin. "Of course he is."

"He's very easy on the eyes."

"He is, but.."

"But?" The older woman wheedles, her gaze darting between the girl

and Billy who's seductively biting on the tip of his whistle while staring right at her.

"He seems like a one time ride."

Mrs. Wheeler gasps, and momentarily forgetting she's speaking with someone's parent, Dani immediately tries to apologize. But before the words can leave her mouth, Mrs. Wheeler is laughing. "Oh I do hope you and my daughter become friends. She needs a little fire in her life."

Dani laughs herself and then pushes up on her seat, she sitting sideways in her chair and facing Mrs. Wheeler. "Come on. Lets get in the water."

"Oh no. I couldn't possibly," she says. "You don't want to be seen spending any more time with me."

As Dani tugs the scrunchie out of her hair and ruffles her dark hair so the waves messily frame her face, she grins. "I don't give a crap about what anyone thinks. You've been kind to me, it's hotter than balls all of a sudden, there's a pool of cool water, and a hot lifeguard that keeps ogling us. If he's going to stare, we might as well give him something to stare at."

"I don't know," Mrs. Wheeler muses, her expression torn about what to do.

The decision, however, is taken out of house mom's hands as Dani suddenly grabs her hand and pulls her up to her feet. Then walking to the edge, Dani hops right on in as Mrs. Wheeler takes her time to sit on the ledge and carefully lower herself into the water. The two immerse themselves in the water and then break the surface to tread water. Sharing a look that has them breaking off into a fit of giggles, Mrs. Wheeler and Dani then leisurely swim back and forth across the small portion of the pool that had been unoccupied. Every few moments they take a break to tread water again and Dani can't help but snort in amusement at every piercing ring of the lifeguard's whistle.

"Slow it down, fat ass, or I'll ban you for the rest of the summer!"

Billy shouts.

"Charming," Dani deadpans, shaking her head at Billy when he looks back to her and nods as if he'd done that for her benefit. "God he's lucky he has such a nice body."

Mrs. Wheeler laughs, she then swimming to the pool's edge. "I hate to cut this short, but I should be going. Motherly and wife duties call."

"That's fine." Dani follows and pulls herself out of the pool, she sitting on the edge and ringing out her hair of the chemical laden water. "It was nice to meet you and ogle Hargrove with you."

"Same," Mrs. Wheeler laughs. "I'll see you around, Dani."

"See you."

Dani gives herself a moment after Mrs. Wheeler leaves, she kicking her feet back and forth through the water. Minutes pass and then Dani stands, she heading over to her chair and rummaging through it for the small bottle of shampoo and conditioner that she'd brought along with her to wash the pool water out of her hair. Then taking that and her towel, Dani heads towards the shower room. And even though Dani thrives in the dark, the dimly lit shower room gives her pause. She doesn't know why she hesitates, maybe it was the talk about demo-dogs and demogorgons the kids subjected to her these passed couple of days, but she eventually shakes her head clear and walks towards the very back of the room for the last stall.

Humming to herself, Dani drapes her towel on a hook on the wall and then sets her small bottles on the ledge where a bar of soap sits. She doesn't bother closing the curtain after she turns on the water and adjusts the temperature, and steps under the spray with a content sigh. After letting the water run down over her head for a few long seconds, Dani then pours some shampoo into the palm of her hand and starts lathering up her hair. Once it's nice and soapy, she turns around and tilts her head back to rinse.

Eyes closed, Dani runs her hands through her hair to get the shampoo all out. A rather deep hum of approval has her eyes snapping open and Dani groans at the sight of Billy leering at her. His gaze follows

the suds as they travel down her body. "Shouldn't you be making sure the kids aren't drowning, Hargrove?"

"You look really good in red," he says instead. "Has anyone ever told you that?"

"Don't change the subject, asshole." Dani gives him her back just as he smirks at her, she now working conditioner into her hair. "What are you doing in here?"

"The hottest girl walked into the showers. I wanted to see if I could sneak a peak." A bar of soap goes flying at him and he barely dodges it, laughing.

"Fuckin' pig. Don't you have kids to terrorize?"

"There'll be kids to terrorize all summer," he grins. "I just wanted to talk to you some more."

"Bullshit. You were hoping to at least get to second base or further."

"Well if you're offering.."

Dani snorts. "Not a chance." The water shuts off and she slowly rings out her hair as she keeps eye contact with Billy. "So what are you really doing in here?" She runs her towel over her hair and rubs it mostly dry. As she wraps the towel around her bikini clad body, she quirks an eyebrow at him. "Well?"

Billy's grin falters. "I'm on break. No one out there was worth my time."

"Is that meant to flatter me?"

"Maybe. Is it working?" Rolling her eyes, Dani walks out of the stall and back towards the main door. She doesn't have to look over her shoulder to know that Billy is following her and once back at her chair she plops down and gestures to the chair next to hers. "Knew you couldn't resist me."

"Slow your roll there, *stud*. I'm just gonna eat my lunch and figured I'd share since you can't seem to keep your eyes off me." He huffs, but

still takes a seat and watches as Dani rummages through her bag before pulling out sandwiches and chips. "Did you know Mrs. Wheeler realized you were staring?"

"That was the point. I wanted to fluster you." He takes the food, surprised to find it still cool after sitting in a bag under the sun.

"Well you ended up flustering the wrong person," Dani tells him. "The mom's around here have got it bad for you."

"What can I say? I'm irresistible."

Dani's nose wrinkles as Billy takes a bite out of his sandwich, she then tucking into her own food. Apparently swimming worked up an appetite. Billy polishes off his sandwich pretty quickly and then he's up and walking away with a muttered *I'll be back*. Dani watches him go, she shrugging and continues to eat. Moments later Billy returns, two sodas in hand.

"You're being nice," she muses suspiciously. "Why are you being nice?"

Billy cracks open his drink after Dani takes hers and shrugs. "You're interesting, Lewis. I flirt and talk shit, and instead of falling to your knees you rather bitch back at me instead. It's.. refreshing."

Cracking open her own soda, Dani takes a sip before asking, "You already going soft on me, Billy?"

"For you I'll always be hard, sweetheart."

"Jesus you're something else," Dani laughs, shaking her head in amusement. She finishes off her food fairly quickly afterward, she putting all the trash into her bag. Billy stands just as she does, she smiling weakly at him. "Well.. it's actually been fun talking to you, dumbass. Maybe I'll see you around."

Billy watches Dani walk off, he putting his sunglasses back on with a smirk. "You can bet your sweet ass you will."

4. Heaven

Heaven

*I still remember the moment we met
The touch that he planted
The garden he left
I guess the rain was just half that effect
No need to imagine
'Cause I know it's true
They say "all good boys go to heaven"
But bad boys brings heaven to you*

On one of Nathan Lewis' blessed days off from work, he decided he wanted to explore the town like his daughter previously had. He had yet to see what the big deal about Starcourt mall was, so after making some plans he and daughter set out to spend the afternoon watching a movie and finding a place to eat.

Dani's just tied a red and black flannel around her waist, shielding the back of her thighs to give her dad some piece of mind because her jean shorts were a little too short, when there's a knock on her bedroom door. "Yeah?"

"You almost ready, kiddo?"

"Yeah! I just need my shoes." She hurriedly opens her closet, digging out a pair of flat black boots. And after slipping her feet into them, she opens her door and beams up at her dad. "Ready."

"Good. You're driving."

After walking out and locking up their house, father and daughter make themselves comfortable in Dani's Firebird. They roll down their windows and the engine comes to life with a roar. Letting the engine idle, Dani then reaches over to the glove box to retrieve one of her favorite mix-tapes. As the engine idles, she pops the tape into the cassette player. The familiar tune of *Wild Cherry's Play That Funky Music* starts to play through the speakers and Nathan Lewis leans forward with a grin to crank up the volume. Laughing, Dani then

perches a pair of sunglasses on the bridge of her nose as her dad does the same.

As she starts to reverse out of their driveway, her dad sings. *"Yeah, once I was a Funky singer. Playin' in a rock and roll band."*

Dani laughs at him, shaking her head in amusement as she sees her dad dancing in his seat from the corner of her eye. She stops at the stop sign and turns on her signal light, she taking a right which will take them on their way out of the neighborhood. The music starts to become infectious and just as she hits on the gas, she can't help herself. She sings along with her dad. *"Yeah they were dancin' and singin', and movin' to the groovin'. And just when it hit me, somebody turned around and shouted play that funky music, white boy!"*

She ends up cracking up, letting her dad car karaoke his heart out. The entire ride to the mall is spent laughing at her dad as he ridiculously sings and dances along to every song on her mix tape.

Then once at the mall, not even fifteen minutes in and Dani starts to poke fun at her dad who's garnering plenty of looks from the female population.

"Don't encourage them," Nathan hisses at his daughter. "They're young enough to be my kid. Jesus."

But Dani doesn't listen. She catches the gaze of what appears to be a couple of teenagers ogling her dad, and waggles her eyebrows at them until they blush and look away. "But it's hilarious." Nathan shoves his daughter as they walk around the second floor of the mall, she tripping into the railing before lunging back at him. "Rude!"

Laughing, he slings his arm around his daughter's shoulders. "So what movie are we watching?"

"The Breakfast Club. And I don't want to hear any complaints!" She's quick to tell him.

"Fine. But I'm eating all the buttery popcorn I can and I don't want to hear any complaints."

"Fine."

The movie immediately becomes one of Dani's favorites even as her dad grumbles about picking the movie next time. As they head back down to ground level, they start talking about what they want to eat. They don't want to drive around looking for a diner suitable to their tastes when there's a perfectly good food court within the mall, so after grabbing a few slices of pizza each, the father/daughter duo sit down and talk about the movie over their meal.

"Hey how about some ice cream?" Nathan asks afterward.

"Sure. The ice cream is good at Scoops Ahoy."

Her dad pokes fun at all the sailor themed furniture when they enter and Dani swats at him to behave.

"Do my eyes deceive me or is an angel floating my way?"

Dani snorts, her gaze zeroing in on the one person too young to be behind the glass case of ice cream. "Dustin," she muses in greeting. Steve's eyes widen upon spotting her, he whipping off his sailor's hat and ruffling his hair. He tries to lean casually on the ice cream refrigerator with a too cool attitude, but slips, and quickly corrects himself with a muttered curse. Dani smirks at him. "Steve."

"D-Dani. Hey," he drawls. "How's it going?" Steve starts to smirk, but Nathan clearing his throat and crossing his arms over his chest has his eyes subtly widening.

"Steve, I don't think you've met my dad," she grins. "Dad, this is Steve. Only met him once before, but the kids apparently adore him. And you know Dustin, of course."

"Hey, Mr. Lewis. How's it going?"

"Dustin, I was wondering where you got off to," Nathan says. "My refrigerator's been oddly full these passed two days."

"Aw, you missed me. No worries. I'll be back soon. Your refrigerator has the best food out of everyone's household."

Dani and Nathan chuckle at Dustin's easy going attitude, and Steve's stammering catches them momentarily off guard. "H-Hi, Mr. Lewis.

It's nice to meet you. I'm Steve."

Nathan looks at Steve, then at Dani, then back at Steve and sizes him up. "Hey, kid." He pauses rather dramatically as he holds Steve's gaze, he then looking at the ice cream selection. "So what do you recommend?"

Steve blinks owlishly at Nathan Lewis, and Dani and Dustin share amused glances. A sigh from behind Dani has her stepping aside, only to reveal an annoyed looking Max and an awed looking Eleven.

"Will you hurry it up, moron? El and I need our fix of sugar!"

Nathan chuckles. "Oh Max. I missed you, kid." Dani's dad ruffles Max's red hair, she swatting at his hand while sheepishly smiling. "And just for that comment, ice cream's on me." Then turning back to his daughter, Nathan tells her, "Get the girl's ice cream on us. I'll just be sitting out by the fountain, so bring me my cone when Mr. Steve stops ogling you."

"What?! I'm not- I wouldn't-" Max and Eleven watch Mr. Lewis take his leave after handing over his wallet to Dani, both girls simultaneously turning back to face Steve and crossing their arms over their chest with smug smiles. "Why are you looking at me like that? And how do you even know the new girl? What have I been missing?"

"Steve-O, Steve-O, Steve-O," Dustin muses. "This is one of things that not must be spoken of in public. We'll tell you later."

"What? Not even a little hint?" Dustin looks to Dani who looks to Eleven. The girls shrug and Eleven makes the first move, she holding her arm out for Steve's inspection. The **011** is bold against her pale skin. Steve huffs, raising an eyebrow at the tattoo he's seen more than once. "Yeah. And?"

Dani steps forward then, removing her bracelet and holding her arm out for inspection. **009**.

Steve's brow furrows and then his eyes widen, mouth dropping open in surprise. "Oh."

"Yeah. *Oh.*"

The window at Steve's back slides open and the two boys whirl around with a yelp. "Hey, dingus, get to work! And you, kid I don't even know, out from behind the counter. You don't work here."

Dustin rolls his eyes but does as he's told and then Dani is letting the girls give Steve their order before her own.

"What are you guys even doing here?" He asks Max as he's scooping strawberry ice cream into a cone. Handing it off to her, he then starts working on the vanilla for Eleven. "Are you even allowed to be here?" Max and Eleven simultaneously snort, look at one another before breaking off into giggles, and then rush out of the parlour with their newly acquired treats.

"Those dumb shits are going to get in so much trouble," Dustin muses, shaking his head in disappointment. "I'm definitely telling Hop when I see him." Then facing Steve once more, Dustin orders a butterscotch flavored ice cream. Once it's safe in his hand, he starts walking towards the door. "Just put it on the Lewis' tab. Later, Harrington. See you around, sweet cheeks."

Dani can't help but laugh at Dustin's antics. When Steve sighs, she faces him once more with a smile of her own. "Those kids are something else."

"Tell me about it." He flips his scoop in hand and Dani does her best to keep from laughing at his poor attempts of showing off. "So if you're like Eleven, do you have any.. abilities?" He asks, lowering his voice at the end and glancing suspiciously from side to side.

"Oh. Um. Yeah. I can walk in and out of shadows."

His eyes widen. "No way."

"Way." Chuckling softly, Dani then averts her gaze to the ice cream. "So do you guys have peppermint?"

"Of course. Waffle cone or regular?"

"Waffle." Steve makes quick work of serving up the two cones and

Dani takes out enough money from her dad's wallet to cover the tab. He thanks her, as per Scoops Ahoy guidelines, and Dani waves as best as she can with ice cream in her hands. "See you around, Harrington."

"Yeah. Same to you, Lewis." He ruffles his hair and Dani can't help but find his nervous tick oddly adorable.

When Dani finds her dad, she finds him surrounded by Max and Eleven chattering his ear off. Nathan's laughing and Dani takes a moment to just watch him. For so long it's been just him and her, but ever since Chief Hopper dropped a bombshell on them it's like they can breathe and be normal people for once.

Stepping forward before their ice cream can melt, Dani quickly hands one cone off to her dad. "Here you go." He takes it with a mumbled thanks and Dani glances between the girls. "So what brings you here against Hopper's wishes?"

"Mike was being a total d-bag," Max says. "Boyfriends do nothing but lie."

Eleven nods. "Stupid boys."

"And that's my cue to go exploring on my own," Nathan says. "Behave. All three of you. And, Dani, I'll meet you in hour."

"Sure thing, dad." A moment after Nathan Lewis takes his leave, Dani raises an eyebrow at the girls. "What else are you guys up to?"

"Max brought me to find my style," Eleven sheepishly admits. "Not Hop's. Not Mike's, but mine."

"Good on you, kid." Dani glances at her black romper with various shapes and squiggles in various colors. "I like it. It looks good on you."

Eleven blushes and Max chuckles happily. A bathroom break is soon needed, but only Eleven is the one to enter one of the stalls. Max and Dani hang out by the sinks as Dani fluffs her loose hair to her liking, and Max hops up on the counter.

"So I heard something interesting," the red head slowly states. "Care

to tell me if it's true?"

"Hit me with it."

"Did you really spend time with Billy down at the pool?" Whatever Dani had been expecting, it wasn't that. She tenses and stares at Max, and the redhead rolls her eyes. "It's just.. he's been teasing me about it. Telling me he's going to take you out and.. do stuff. He's an asshole."

"Yeah. I kind of realized that early on, Max."

"Then why? There are so many other better people to make friends with."

"I.. don't know. Honestly," Dani admits. Eleven exits the stall and goes about washing her hands, glancing at Dani and offering her a small smile. "He's crude and mean, and well.. we just get along if you can believe it."

"He's not a good person," Max then tells her. "He's.. been doing a bit better, but he's still not good." This time Eleven nods along and Dani sighs.

"Thanks for looking out, but really, girls, it's fine. I'm fine. If Billy crosses the line with me or with anyone I care about in my presence, then we'll have a problem. But until then-"

"You're going to keep talking to him." Max realizes and rolls her eyes as she hops off the counter. "Fine. But if he hurts you, I'm busting his balls."

Dani laughs and slings an arm around Max's shoulders, then Eleven's, and leads them out of the bathroom. "You'd have to get in line, kid. After I'm done with him, then my dad is up to bat. I'm not sure there'd be anything left of Billy Hargrove for anyone else to mess up."

Another warm day while the kids are out doing God knows what, Dani decides a visit to the pool is in order. But today she's feeling rather playful, and after finding out Billy's working a shift, she hides her black one piece bathing suit underneath a white crop top and

some jean shorts. Normally a one piece wouldn't be too provocative, but Dani found one where the neckline scooped low to show off a generous amount of cleavage and the bottom half was cut high on her hips. And since it was cut high, the bottom back of her bikini was practically a thong and Dani couldn't wait to scandalize a few individuals.

So after packing a couple of sandwiches and chips, alongside her phone and towel, Dani hops into her Firebird and drives down to the pool. The cougars seemed to have already went on the prowl and Dani's genuinely pleased to see Mrs. Wheeler among them.

"Hey, Mrs. Wheeler, this chair taken?" She asks.

"Dani, hi! And no, please take a seat." Mrs. Wheeler beams. As Dani places her bag on the chair and kicks off her flip-flops, the elder woman then makes introductions to her lady friends who are all kind in return. "And didn't I tell you to call me Karen when we first met?"

"Probably. I'm pretty stubborn though."

"All teenagers are, sweetie." Dani takes off her shirt and tosses it aside, she turning and giving her back to the lifeguard chair that's currently occupied. Mrs. Wheeler glances at it, her smile widening. "You missed the show, by the way."

Dani smirks. "On the contrary. The show's only beginning."

Mrs. Wheeler's friends seem to be paying attention as Dani unbuttons her shorts, their own grins blossoming as Dani seductively shimmy the shorts off her hips and down her legs. Their gazes quickly dart between Dani and Billy, and the women all start to giggle.

"What did you do?" Mrs. Wheeler wonders. "He lowered his sunglasses almost immediately and now keeps shifting in his chair."

Chuckling, Dani feigns innocence. "Me? I didn't do anything. It's not my fault Mr. Hargrove can't handle a little skin." At that Dani turns and the women all cackle at the sight of her suit riding up her ass, and Dani amusingly meets Billy's intense gaze from across the pool. "I'm totally going to regret this later," she says to the ladies.

"Oh to be young and have a body worthy of wearing that suit," one of Mrs. Wheeler's friend says.

As Dani gives her back to Billy once more, she sets out to spreading her towel over the chair before taking a seat and reclining in it. Then setting her sunglasses on her face to shield just exactly where it is she's looking, Dani takes joy in witnessing Billy have a hard time paying attention to watching those in the pool. He looks tense and keeps grabbing at his shorts, adjusting himself, and Dani has to bite her lip to keep from laughing outright.

"You know what? I'm going for a swim. Do any of you ladies wish to join me?"

Mrs. Wheeler is the only one to join as the others start giving their excuses and calling it a day. Dani waves them off, and then she and Mrs. Wheeler walk into the pool over by the stairs. Dani takes her time in fully immersing herself in the water and then the two of them start swimming laps.

Dani makes sure to swim right in front of Billy's perch and Mrs. Wheeler is right there by her side laughing as they do so. Eventually, though, teasing Billy loses the thrill and the two finally swim over to the ladder to climb on out.

"Looking good out there, Mrs. Wheeler," a familiar voice drawls. Billy saunters up with two towels, handing them out as Mrs. Wheeler bashfully thanks him. "Perfect form."

Beaming, Mrs. Wheeler says, "Well your forms is amazing." Billy smugly chuckles and Dani snorts as Mrs. Wheeler realizes how the words came out of her mouth. "I'm sorry. I mean, I've seen you teaching.. lessons. Swimming lessons."

"You know I could teach you if you'd like."

Dani thinks he's speaking to Mrs. Wheeler, so she doesn't have a problem placing the towel over her face to dab it dry as Billy ridiculously flirts. But when Mrs. Wheeler's elbow sharply jabs her, she looks up to see Billy staring directly at her. "Uhh.. what?"

His eyes practically gleam. "I can give you lessons. I know all the styles," he smirks. "Freestyle. Butterfly," he muses, taking a step closer to Dani and looking at her through his lashes as he momentarily pauses. "*Breaststroke*."

Somehow he makes placing a strip of gum into his mouth look rather seductively and Dani's brain short circuits. Her towel falls from her hands and Billy chuckles as Dani curses, both of them bending down to pick the towel up at the same time.

"You okay?" He muses as they stand back up.

"Goddammit," Dani hisses. "You win this round, Hargrove."

"Think about it, Lewis." He winks. "Off the top of my head, I'm pretty sure there's a good pool over at Motel 6 on Cornwallis. It's very quiet. Very *private*." Dani gulps and his trademark smirks reemerges. "Shall we say tonight?"

Stepping up close, Dani pats Billy on the chest. Her expression momentarily falters at the feel of his toned chest and she leaves her hand there, splaying her fingers before trailing them downward and tugging on his whistle. "Keep dreaming."

"Always." Dani glances over her shoulder at Mrs. Wheeler, she gesturing for the woman to follow. As the two try to move passed, Dani shouldering Billy in the process, the palm of a hand connects to her right butt cheek with a resounding slap. She yelps, Mrs. Wheeler snickers, and Billy blows her a kiss as she glares at him. "Stick around, Lewis. I got a double shift today and you being here makes work suck less."

"Buy me a Coke and I'll think about it."

- X -

Call it boredom, but whatever had possess Dani to tease Billy also has her sticking around long after Mrs. Wheeler has left. She had made a quick trip to the showers to wash the pool water from her hair, she then laying out in her chair to dry off just enough in order to pull her shorts back on. It was amusing at first to make Billy squirm, but then

every other person started to take notice of her swimsuit and the stares weren't so amusing then.

She's munching on the snacks she had packed, sitting in the shade of an umbrella when Billy drops a cold can of Coke in her lap and dropping into the seat next to her. Dani curses, quickly grabbing the cold can and placing it on the small table next to her chair as Billy laughs.

"Dick."

"Aw don't be like that." He looks at her bag and after a terse nod from Dani he picks it up to rummage through it for the other sandwich and chips.

After cracking her can of Coke open, Dani takes a sip before leaning back in her chair. Staring at Billy's profile, she asks, "So why are you working a double? Wasting precious time watching the tiny terrors doesn't seem up your alley."

Billy snorts and busies himself eating for a moment. "One of the lifeguards has taken it upon herself to come and go as she pleases. I just think Heather's being a bitch because I forgot to pick her up for our date last night."

"Don't know why she's being bitchy. She totally dodged a bullet." Billy tenses and glares at her, and Dani blows him a kiss. "Kidding. Chill out, Hargrove."

"Whatever." He finishes his sandwich within a couple more bites, moving onto the chips and his own soda. "So what brought today on?" He asks. "Not gonna lie, I liked it. A lot."

His too smug grin makes Dani roll her eyes. "I was bored. Thought it'd funny to make you squirm."

"Hmm. You're lucky I'm working or else I'd have made you squirm back in the showers."

"Of course you would have." She chuckles at him.

After leaning back in his seat and getting as comfortable as he can,

and staring a moment too long which makes Dani actually squirm, Billy chuckles. "You know for all the lines and innuendo I throw at you, I don't actually know what your type is. What is your type, Lewis? What makes that heart of yours race and your thighs.. clench?"

"I don't necessarily have a type." She shrugs. "It varies."

"Yeah? Anyone in Hawkins caught your interest?"

She doesn't know how to feel about Billy digging for her personal information, but she finds herself telling him anyhow. "Two, actually. One more so than the other."

"Do tell."

"Well.. they're the complete opposite of one another. One guy has really great hair and is kind of dorky. Totally the soft and gentle type," she muses. "And the other," she slowly smirks now, "the other is a total douchebag with a great ass, pretty eyes, and a knack for hitting on the cougars while he's at work."

Billy laughs and the genuineness of it surprises Dani. She hasn't known him for long, but she's seen enough- the mocking laughs, the cruel remarks, the too tight grips on the arms of those that annoy him- and it surprisingly hasn't made her run for the hills. Everyone knows Billy Hargrove is the definition of a bad boy and someone to steer clear of, but Dani finds herself being drawn to him instead.

Several people start to stare which prompts her to toss a chip at him. "Shut up." But he only picks the chip up off his lap, tosses it into his mouth, and meets Dani's gaze before she rolls her eyes at him. "Fair enough. Now who's my competition?"

"I don't know if I should tell you. I don't think I can trust you to not seek him out and subtly threaten him even though he has no idea I might have a slight crush on him."

"Come on, Lewis, tell me. I promise to leave the lesser man alone."

Momentarily thinking on it, Dani finally caves. "Name's Steve. Apparently Max and her friends all know him." Billy's back to

laughing again and those who personally know the teen are now staring with wide eyes. "Jesus Christ," she hisses, "will you shut up!"

"Harrington?" Billy wonders. "You're crushing on Steve 'The Hair' Harrington?"

Dani slides down in her chair with a frown. "Of course you know him. You better not tell him shit, Hargrove. It's just a little crush that will go away. He looks like clingy type which is why I didn't pursue him. If he ever finds out-"

"He won't. Not from me." Finally getting control of his amusement, Billy's eyes sparkle as he stares at her. "Well aren't you just full of surprises today."

"Yeah, yeah. Don't get used to it."

5. Highway to Hell

Highway to Hell

I'm on the highway to hell

On the highway to hell

Highway to hell

I'm on the highway to hell

Yet another day passes with no kids barging into her home, so Dani takes it upon herself to be productive. She's been meaning to change the oil on her car, but she's been lazy or occupied by exploring Hawkins. Now, however, is a surprisingly cool day and she's got nothing else to do. So as Nathan Lewis eats some breakfast before getting ready for work, Dani dresses in a white racerback tank top and a pair of jean shorts- clothes she doesn't care to get oil on should things turn messy. Her hair gets pulled up into a messy topknot and she ties a yellow folded bandanna around her hairline to keep the shorter strands out of her eyes.

So after parking her car in the middle of the driveway and then gathering the creeper, the jack, and blocks to keep her car lifted so she could slide underneath, Dani then goes back to the garage to grab two oil pans, the new oil filter, a funnel, and a container of oil. She grabs a stack of old newspaper to wrap the old oil filter in and a couple of rags she knows she's going to need.

Jacking up the front end of her Firebird and setting the blocks beneath it so it doesn't fall on her, Dani slides one of the oil pans underneath while plopping down on the creeper and gathering a wrench and a rag from the ground. Then setting her boombox next to her car and pressing play, Queen's *Another One Bites The Dust* starts to blare as Dani slides herself underneath the car.

Staring up at the oil pan attached to her car, she locates the plug and sighs. "I really hate this part."

The drain plug is basically a nut that needs to be unscrewed, but the tricky part is keeping the nut in place after it's unscrewed and then hurriedly moving her hand out of the way so the oil can fall into the

other pan that's right next to her head.

With a rag wrapped around her hand, Dani unscrews the nut, grimaces when she gets oil on her hand, and moves out of the way just in time for the oil to start draining. As the old oil is draining, Dani slides herself back out to start removing the oil filter from the top of the engine. Being careful she finally removes the old filter and then empties that into the other drain pan she had left over. Then once it's empty she wraps it up in newspaper to keep from getting oil anywhere else.

I Wanna Rock by Twisted Sister starts playing and Dani takes the moment to sing and mess around. Laughing at herself she then screws the new filter in place. *Hotel California* plays next and Dani nearly chokes on her water, her mind immediately jumping to the one boy from California whose been on her mind lately. She checks here and there to see if the oil is done draining, and when it is she reluctantly settles back down on the creeper to slide underneath her car.

Dani's in the process of wiping off the excess oil around the drain when a rumbling engine can be heard getting nearer and nearer. The familiar sound suddenly makes her heart race, but she shakes the feeling off and focuses on the task at hand. But then the rumbling stops when it's at it's closest, a horn honks, and Dani jerks in surprise.

"Lewis?"

"Oh god." Dani slides out, still lying down and staring at Billy practically hanging out the driver's side window. "Hey, Billy." She weakly waves. Smirking at the sight of her, he takes it upon himself to park and get out.

Dani hurriedly slides back underneath her car to replace the drug plug. *No One Like You* by Scorpions comes on next and Dani closes her eyes with a groan. She just knows that this particular song coming on at the exact moment Billy exits his car is going to make him say something.

Sliding out once more, Dani sits up and finds Billy smirking at her. "Knew I was coming, did you?" He asks arrogantly. "Nice song choice."

"Shut it, Hargrove."

He chuckles as he comes to a stop just in front of her. "You do your own work on your car? Not gonna lie, I'm a bit turned on."

Billy offers her a hand up and Dani takes it, she grimacing at the oil she leaves on his hand. He shrugs and grabs one of her spare rags, wiping it off as if it were no big deal. "Uh, part of the deal for me getting a car was that I learned to take care of it," she says while lowering the volume on the boombox.

"Nice. I like a girl who knows her way around the guts of her ride."

Dani watches as he looks her up and down, his tongue peeking out as he licks his bottom lip. She scoffs. "Of course you do. And how the hell do you make that even sound dirty?"

"It's a talent." Billy looks around and his gaze eventually lands on her dad's patrol cruiser. Something in his expression falters and Dani grins. "Who's the cop? Mom or dad?"

She takes a sip of water before answering. "It's just me and my dad." A door shutting has Dani looking over her shoulder. "Speak of the devil," she then muses.

Billy seems to straighten up at the sight of Nathan Lewis, Dani's dad's gaze hardening at the sight of the boy in a white tank top and too tight jeans. Dani's lips press into a hard line to keep from laughing as Nathan makes a beeline for them.

"Billy, this is my dad Nathan Lewis. Dad, this is Billy Hargrove. He's Max's step-brother."

"Sir."

Billy shakes Nathan's hand with a firm grip, he layering on the charm a little too thick. The two stare each other down, Dani's gaze darting back and forth like a ping pong match. Nathan's deadpan expression is the complete opposite to Billy's grin.

The moment breaks and Nathan cracks a smile. Looking at Dani, he says, "I like this one. Much better than the goofball drooling over you

at the mall."

"Dad!"

Billy chuckles. "See, Dani, even your dad doesn't like Harrington."

"Shut up, Billy."

"Well as amusing as this is, I gotta head into work, kid."

"Yeah. You coming home or does Hop have you working late again?"

Nathan actually turns rather sheepish and Dani huffs at him. Her dad's never kept secrets from her, but ever since he bonded with Chief Hopper her dad's been kinda mum about work. "You got cash, right? I'll probably pick something up and eat at the station."

"Yeah I got cash. I'll see you later then."

"Later. Nice meetin' 'ya, Billy. You touch my daughter, I'll kill 'ya."

"Nice meeting you too, Mr. Lewis." With those parting words, Dani watches Billy keep up his most charming smile until her dad gets into his patrol cruiser and drives off. When he's out of sight, Billy immediately turns to her and his smile turns positively wicked. "What do you think he'd do if he knew I already touched you?" He asks, referring to the pool incident and the indecent swimsuit.

"Don't even joke about that. He'd rip that swimsuit to pieces and then take away my car."

"Mmm. I'd hate to see that swimsuit suddenly disappear."

"Of course you would." Dani goes back to the task at hand, she putting a funnel into one particular opening near her engine. She has to bend over to reach when pouring the new oil in, and momentarily tenses when she feels a presence press close to her side. Just as she feels like she can breathe, she jerks when she feels a hand run up the back of her thigh. She immediately kicks out. "Knock if off, asshole!"

Billy chuckles as he walks to the side of her car, he leaning just out of reach. "So when my car needs an oil change, do you think you can do

it for me, Lewis?"

"So you can ogle my ass? Pass." As she's waiting for the oil to sink, she reaches into her pocket and tosses Billy her keys. "Make yourself useful and turn the car on. I need to check for leaks.

"So hot." Billy does as he's told and after checking up top and underneath, Dani finds no leaks.

They take a slow trip around the the block to get the oil flowing through where it needs to go and after checking the dipstick to see the oil level, a bit more oil is added and Dani is done. Then after disposing of what needs to be disposed of and seeing that Billy is in no rush to leave, she gestures him inside her home.

"What are the plans for today?" She asks, going to her refrigerator and pouring herself a glass of juice.

Leaning against the kitchen door jamb with his arms crossed over his chest, Billy shrugs. "Not much. Max is gone with some little girl that my dad actually approved of, so I'm off babysitting duty. My schedule is clear," he muses. Dani drains her glass and sets it aside with a hum. "Why? Did you have something in mind?"

"I have absolutely shit to do."

A moment of silence passes before Billy says, "Then lets just drive. You have cash, we'll take my car, and we'll just make it up as we go."

Dani hesitates briefly, she searching his expression for any type of ulterior motives. For once.. there's nothing. Billy seems at ease and hopeful which is why Dani finds herself agreeing. "Sure. Why the hell not. Just let me wash up." Billy's smile is one of the genuine ones he rarely displays and Dani's heart flutters. Mentally scolding herself, she then tells him, "Raid the fridge if you want while you wait. Or watch some TV. I'll be right back down."

As Billy remains downstairs, Dani rushes upstairs and grabs a towel before heading into her bathroom. She quickly washes up, scrubbing away any oil and the smell of it before jumping back out and wrapping herself up in a towel.

After finding another racerback tank top, this one in black, Dani quickly pulls it on over her head and finds another pair of cut-off shorts. She dons a pair of combat boots and then puts her damp hair back in a topknot that's less purposely messy and more styled to appear as if were messy. Then pocketing her cash and phone, Dani heads back downstairs to find Billy lounging in her dad's recliner and watching MTV.

"Where to first?"

Billy glances over at her, grinning. "You tell me. Lets go."

- X -

They end up taking Billy's car for their spur of the moment road trip, and the further they get from Hawkins the more Billy seems to be at genuine ease. The windows are rolled down, a cigarette dangles from between his lips, and Dani's socked feet find their way to his dash. The radio volume is cranked all the way up and Dani sips on a cherry slushee in between singing at the top of her lungs.

They pick up some Burger King some time after noon and Billy drives to a park that's located near a pond. Sitting in his car as they munch on their lunch, he reaches out and touches her forearm. She freezes.

"What's with the tat?"

Dani glances down at the **009** and she swallows down her bite of food, suddenly regretting that she chose to stop wearing the bracelet so much. "That's, uh, that's a part of my past that's better not brought up right now," she says. "Ask me again another time."

"Oohh. So mysterious. Now I wanna know even more."

Cracking a grin, she shakes her head. "Not now. Ask me something else."

Billy bites into his burger. "You mentioned earlier that it's just you and your dad. Where'd your mom go?"

"Wow. You're just jumping in head first, aren't 'ya?" Billy shrugs and eats some more. And though most people usually get emotional over

the mention of an absentee parent, Dani's rather indifferent to it. Maybe if she had actually known her mother she'd feel some sort of other way. "She died. In childbirth."

"..oh."

"Relax, Hargrove. Don't look so panicked. It was a long time ago."

Billy snorts and changes the subject all together. "What do you want to do next?"

"I have no fuckin' idea. Just pick a direction and drive."

- X -

After lunch Billy finds a movie theater for them to stop at. The parking lot is mostly empty and Dani picks the only romance movie available just to annoy the hell out of him. But he seems to turn the tables on her the moment the lights go out, leaning over into her space and blowing air into her ear with teasing remarks. Dani tries her best not to show how much his actions are amusing her rather than annoying her, and she eventually has to punch his thigh when when his hand finds it way atop her own thigh and his fingers skim inward.

"You know you're the only girl I actually hang out with who doesn't put out?" He murmurs.

With a sickly sweet voice, Dani coos, "Don't pretend you don't enjoy my company without the sex, Billy. We both know that if sex was all you were after, you'd have pushed me aside without batting an eye for the next available piece of ass."

He sighs. "Fair enough." Billy then places his arm around the back of her shoulders, and after glaring suspiciously at him Dani settles under his arm.

They watch the rest of the movie, poking fun at it, and immediately leave the second the credits start to roll.

"What do you say we find a diner before heading back to that shithole we call home?"

"T'd say that sounds like a plan."

As Billy drives to their next destination, Dani texts her father to let him know where they're at and when she'll be home. And by the time they get to the diner, Nathan still hasn't texted back. It's a bit odd, but Dani pushes it to the back of her mind as they enter the diner. The two talk about anything and everything, some subjects being more touchy than others for Billy if the tightening of jaw or the clench of his fists were anything to go by.

They're in the middle of eating their plates of meatloaf and mashed potatoes when a thunderstorm strikes out of nowhere, and Billy takes glee in the fact that Dani is not a fan of them. By the time they're able to leave, and Billy has soothed Dani's worries that the storm has truly passed, the roads are slick and the moon is high in the sky.

- X -

The volume is once again cranked, but this time Billy has his AC blasting since the thunderstorm went through Hawkins and turned the atmosphere rather muggy. The two are acting like fools, wasting their last bit of feel good energy before Billy has to drop off Dani when he suddenly curses, hands flying to the steering wheel as something heavy hits the windshield.

Billy curses again as the car spins and the last thing Dani sees is his panicked expression as her side of the car slams into a telephone pole.

The next time Dani's eyes flutter open.. it's dark. It's endless black, she has a killer headache, she's barefoot, and apparently the ground is covered in a couple inches of water.

"What the.." She stumbles in no particular direction, heart thudding in her chest as she gently touches the side of her head that's killing her. She's confused, tired, and scared, and though she's used to the dark.. this is something else entirely. "H-Hello?" She eventually calls out, her voice echoing. "Billy?"

Between one blink and the next, there's a scene in front of her that tries to take form. It's like a TV trying to catch a signal, the visual

grainy and cutting out every other second. It's Eleven.

"El?" The young girl looks around, confusion evident in her expression as she walks off. "Eleven!"

She's not expecting anything to really happen, so Dani gasps when Eleven whirls around. "D.. ni? Where.. you?"

"El!" She shouts again, she swallowing thickly. "El, I'm right here!"

The younger girl seems frantic now, looking everywhere with a furrowed brow. She seems to be looking in Dani's direction, eyes squinting, so Dani gets as close as she can to Eleven without touching and wills the girl to see her. Seconds tick by and then Eleven jerks back in surprise, eyes widen. "Dani?"

Dani exhales in relief, tears pricking her eyes. "Y-Yeah." She suddenly has her arms full as Eleven throws herself at her and Dani squeezes her as tight as she can without hurting her. "What the hell is going? Where are we?"

"I call it the Void," Eleven tells her. "It's a place I go when I'm mentally searching for someone."

"Then how am I here? Where you looking for me?"

Stepping back, Eleven shakes her head. "No. I was looking for something else, but I ended up here. I heard your echo and.." the younger girl trails off, lips turning down into a frown as her gaze is drawn to one particular direction. "Dani, where are you?"

She blinks. "I'm not sure. But wait, go back. Something? You're searching for *something*?!" A low growl resonates from somewhere behind her and Dani jumps, she placing herself in front of Eleven and shielding her. "What the hell was that?"

"I'll explain later." Eleven tugs on Dani's wrist, pulling her backwards as water sloshes off in the distance. "I don't like this place. It's bad. You need to leave."

"Well I would if I could, but I don't even know how I got here!"

There's a distant roar that momentarily freezes both girls in place and then Eleven's digging her nails into Dani's wrist and bringing the older girl down to her level. Hands grasping either side of Dani's face, Eleven tells her, "You need to wake. Wake up, Dani, and leave wherever you are."

"Wh-"

"Wake up!"

Dani gasps awake to someone shaking her, she blinking at a clearly shaken Billy who sighs in relief upon her eyes opening. He's bleeding from a wound near his hairline and as Dani tries to move her own head throbs in pain. Quickly assessing her whereabouts, she realizes they've crashed and that her head apparently made contact with the passenger window.

"You good?" He asks.

"Y-Yeah. You?"

"My fuckin' car is thrashed and I just had the weirdest hallucination ever."

As Billy exits through his side of the car, Dani slowly follows through the driver's side since her door is pinned shut. She shakily breathes in the muggy air, a sense of dread enveloping her as Eleven's words suddenly resonate through her mind. "Billy? I don't think we should be here. We need to leave."

"In a moment," he distractedly comments. "I need to find out what the hell I hit."

"No. You don't understand. We need to-"

A growl pierces the air, followed by a series of animalistic clicking noises that sends a shiver up and down Dani's spine. They both turn towards a seemingly abandoned building and Dani rushes to Billy's side, her hand gently wrapping around his wrist. "Don't," she pleads as he takes a step towards the noise.

He tries jerking his hand free, but Dani only grips him tighter. "Relax.

I'm just going to see-"

The shadows shift and it's not of Dani's doing. Billy freezes. "I need you trust me right now," she murmurs.

"What?"

"I need you to trust me, Billy. Please say you trust me."

"What the hell are you talking about?" The shadows shift again, followed by a growl, and now Billy is backpedaling away from the mass of shadows that is anything but.

"We're about to be in deep shit, Hargrove. I can get us out of here within seconds, but I need you to say you trust me."

Billy scoffs, but then something steps out of the shadows and roars a deafening roar as its entire face opens up. "Fuck!" As he pushes Dani back towards his car, he realizes that they won't be able to outrun whatever has set their sights on them. "Fine. I trust you. Get us the hell out of here!"

Dani whips around, hugging him chest to chest. "Hold tight."

As his arms go around her, she thinks about the safety and comfort of her home. The shadows seem to know she's in danger and wrap around almost immediately, but before they can be whisked away there's another deafening roar just white hot pain explodes in her right bicep.

Dani shouts, Billy swears, and then Billy is shoving Dani away in a fit of panic when the familiar surroundings of her home come into focus around them.

"What the fuck was that? What the fuck are you?!"

She falls to her knees, sobbing. "That was- I'm not.. they said they closed the gate. That wasn't supposed to be here."

"What the hell are you talking about, Lewis?!"

Dani looks up at, gaze unfocused. "The Upside Down. Where the

monsters live."

"Monsters don't-"

"If you say don't exist," she warns, her posturing straightening and voice going eerily dangerous, "I'm going to punch you in the dick, Hargrove."

Billy starts to pace, fists clenched at his sides. "Whatever. That still doesn't explain how you got us here when we were just on the other side of town."

Dani's mouth opens to retort, but then her cell starts to ring from her back pocket. Quickly standing she pulls out her silver Razr flip phone and finds the call is coming from Chief Hopper's place. Answering it, she asks, "El?"

"Dani! You're okay!?"

"Yeah. I'm good, kid," she says. Her gaze catches that of Billy and she frowns at his too intense stare. "It was a close call. Really close."

"Where were you?"

"I don't- I'm not sure." She wracks her brain for any details of where they'd been, but she realizes she hadn't been paying attention. Not really. "Billy, do you know where we were?"

"BILLY?! He was with you!?"

Dani rolls her eyes just as Billy shakes his head. "Yes he was with me and yes I'm telling him everything. I don't want to hear any judgement coming from you little dillholes. Am I clear?" Numerous voices try to talk over one another, but Dani ignores it all. "I don't care! You weren't almost clawed to death. We were. I had to resort to drastic measures and now he knows what I can do. He gets brought in."

"Fine," Eleven finally relents. *"He can know, but he can't tell a soul."*

"I really doubt Billy is going to go around town telling anyone and everyone that we have powers, kid. Have a little faith in me," Dani

huffs. "And we don't know where we were, but we'll find out tomorrow. We left Billy's car behind and need to pick it up, but not tonight. Not after that."

Then after assuring Eleven and the rest of the party that she's fine and she'll be fine for the rest of the night, Dani hangs up with the kids and meets Billy's gaze.

"We're not getting my car tonight?"

"Hell no," she scoffs. "Unless you want to risk that monster still being there and making a snack out of us."

"Can't you just.. teleport us away or whatever the fuck it is you do?"

"It's not that simple."

"Then how is it?" He asks, gritting his teeth.

Dani's mind momentarily blanks before she sighs, she rubbing at her temples. Forgetting she had hit her head, she winces at the pain and then drops her hand. Taking a seat, she gestures for Billy to do the same. He does, but he sits as far away as possible from her. "Remember earlier you asked about my tattoo?" She asks of him, showing him the numbers once more. He nods. "That was my name up until I was fourteen years of age. **Nine**. I was experimented on as a child," she says.

She goes on to tell him everything about her past, including that of Eleven's and how monsters came to be in Hawkins. Billy sits in disbelief and anger, his anger more so directed at Max for willingly being roped into such dangerous events and putting her life in danger. After all if something were to happen to her, it was likely to be all his fault in the eyes of his dad and Susan.

"When I get my hands on that little shit head," he seethes.

Dani yawns, stretching, and then winces when the wounds on her bicep pull. "Relax. She hangs out with El and El is the most powerful, most kickass kid I've ever seen. Your step-sister will be fine."

"That's not the point, Dani!" He yells. Upon seeing her struggle to see

the wounds on her arm, Billy seems to deflate some. Mentally groaning at himself, he stalks forward and starts herding her towards the kitchen. Then forcefully pushing her into a chair at the kitchen table, he starts opening and slamming cabinets. "Where the hell is your First Aid?"

"Really? That's it? You're not going to ask more about what I can do?"

"I would have if I hadn't seen that.. *thing* with my own two eyes."

"Fair enough." Dani then stands up with a sigh. "Follow me. First Aid is in my bathroom."

Upstairs in her bathroom, Dani grabs the First Aid kit from beneath her sink and sets it on the counter. Since Billy towers over her, she climbs up on the counter to sit so he can access her arm a little bit easier.

"It's mostly stopped bleeding," he mutters. "He grabs some disinfectant and then holds her arm over the sink, he pouring the solution over the cuts. Dani bits her tongue to keep from cursing his name and watches as he closely inspects it. "Do you want to shower now or later?"

"Now. I'm not sleeping in my blood or sweat." He nods once and then steps back, she then saying, "You're sleeping here tonight. I can grab a pair of my dad's sweats if you want to shower."

"Yeah."

Dani and Billy shower in different bathrooms at the same time, she then finding it hard not to stare when he re-enters her room with water still beading down his chest. When he finds her staring he smirks, and Dani rolls her eyes with a huff. "Don't say anything. And help patch me up."

There's not much they can do and Dani's lucky she doesn't need stitches. After disinfecting it once more, Dani holds a gauze pad over the claw marks and lets Billy wrap an ace bandage around it before pinning it closed.

As Dani moves to get ready for bed, her eyes narrow at Billy as he

moves to the opposite side of said bed. "What are you doing?"

"Do you really think I'm going to sleep alone knowing there are monsters out there? Or sleep on the floor?" He asks, smirk slowly forming. "Not a chance, sweetheart."

"Whatever."

"Look at it this way- if that thing comes back at least we'll right next to one another and you can teleport us out again."

"It's not teleporting, it's-"

"I don't care. Get in the damn bed."

"God you're so pushy."

Luckily her bed is big enough for two people, with a little room to spare, and Dani settles under her blanket comfortably. Billy settles in behind her, without touching, and Dani closes her eyes. Suddenly a hand glides over her hip and she kicks out on reflex.

"Goddamn it! Knock it off." Billy chuckles and Dani rolls over, glaring at him. "And to think I thought you were going to be a judgmental asshole after you found out my secret."

"You might be a freak, but you're a hot freak."

"Of course you'd think that." Moving around so the blanket is more secure around her, Dani closes her eyes once more. "Go to sleep, Billy. Your life just got ten times more complicated."

He sighs, but for the rest of the night there's not a single peep from his side of the bed.

6. Ready or Not

READ ME FIRST! I've gotten a few reviews/messages mentioning how Dani having a cellphone doesn't make sense in the 80's. If you had read the very first AN in chapter one, you'd have seen where I mentioned that some things would make an appearance in this story that weren't necessarily from the 80's (for example, Razr cellphones and some music selections). I'm a texting girl and I need my characters to be able to text too. I'm sorry if you don't like the fact that some of these individuals have Razr cellphones, but it had to be done.

Also this is where some scenes you might recognize get thrown all out of whack. Not gonna lie, I forgot the order and just slipped them in with how I thought they could work. Just please go with the flow and enjoy!

Ready or Not

*Ready or not
Here I come
You can't hide.*

Dani wakes slowly, but the smell of cigarette smoke jolts her into sitting up. Though she's tired, she glances around wildly until she realizes the source. Billy. Billy who's sitting on the window sill and smoking a cig by the opened window.

"Jeez," she mumbles, falling back on her pillows and tugging her blanket up over her head. "Open the window wider."

He chuckles. "Did you know you talk in your sleep?" She freezes. "I though I'd wake up to you cuddling me, but no. I wake up to you *moaning* my name."

Hearing the amusement in his voice, Dani whips the blanket off her face. "Fuck off. I did not."

"You totally did. *Oh, Billy. Don't stop. Harder,*" he moans, mimicking a female's cries of pleasure.

As he laughs a little louder, Dani whips one of her smaller pillows at him. "Will you shut up! My dad is going to hear you."

Billy takes a drag and then blows the smoke out the window. "Don't worry about that. Your dad's not even here."

"What?" She frowns. "Did he already leave for work?"

"Nah. He didn't even come home." Dani blinks once and then twice, and practically falls out of bed in her haste to get to the bedroom door. "I'm a light sleeper, Lewis. I'd have known if he came home."

But Dani doesn't pay him any attention as she rushes down the hallway to her father's room, her chest clenching painfully at the sight of her father's bed that has yet to be slept in. Not coming home was not like Nathan Lewis.

Rushing back to her room, Billy is still smoking his cigarette as Dani lunges for her phone. "This isn't like him," she mumbles as she goes through her missed calls list and text messages. "He'd have said something if he wasn't coming home."

"Maybe daddy got a piece of ass last night and didn't want to tell his baby girl."

"One," Dani grimaces, "never to refer to my dad as *daddy* ever again. And two," she then glares at him, "you saw that monster just as I did last night. The gate to the Upside Down was supposed to be closed, but if a monster is here in Hawkins and wreaking havoc then that means someone's messing with the gate again. And if someone is messing with the gate again, then there's a good chance these people know about my and Eleven's powers. If they wish to get to us, who do you think they're going to go after first?"

Billy's arrogant little smirk instantly vanishes. "Shit."

"Exactly." Billy stubs out his cigarette just as Dani tries her dad's phone again. Straight to voicemail. "Goddammit."

"Try the police station," Billy suggests as he gathers his clothes from the previous night.

Without a care in the world, Billy shoves the sweat pants down to his ankles and Dani quickly averts her gaze. She can feel her face heat up and wills it away as she waits for someone at the police station to pick up, but Billy's quiet laughter lets her know he sees it either way.

Flo, the elderly secretary, finally picks up after the sixth ring. *"Hawkins Police Station. How may I help you?"*

"Florence?" Dani gulps. "This is Danielle Lewis. I was just wondering if my dad Nathan Lewis came into work this morning or if you know if he's on some sort of call?"

"Oh you poor thing, you haven't heard?"

"Heard what?" Dani's panic stricken expression meets Billy's stoic expression.

"Chief Hopper and Deputy Lewis went rogue."

Eyes widening, Dani starts pacing her room. "What do you mean they went rogue?!"

"Well they attacked the Mayor, sweetheart. They illegally apprehended a suspect and accused the Mayor of some very slanderous things."

"No. That's bullshit."

"My thoughts exactly." And wait, what? Flo is on.. her side? "If you ask me this town is just full to the brim with secrets and the higher ups got scared when presented with whatever the Chief and your dad had on them. I'm sure they're fine, wherever they are, but you need to take care of yourself until all this is sorted out."

Stunned, all Dani can do is nod. Then realizing Flo can't see her, she stammers, "O-Okay. I'll, uh, I'll behave myself until this gets squared away."

"Well alright, sweetheart. You take care now."

As Dani flips her phone closed, she stares up at Billy in disbelief. "If it's not one thing, it's another."

"What happened?"

She goes on to explain what Flo had told her and Billy huffs. "Well fuck."

"You're telling me." It's Dani's turn to get dressed, she gathering an outfit to change into in the bathroom since Billy didn't seem to be budging any time soon. Pulling on a white short sleeved peasant blouse and a pair of loose fitted cuffed jeans with holes in the knees, Dani then exited and quickly threw on a pair of Converse and a pair of sunglasses. "Well lets get going, Hargrove. We need to get your car and find out where the hell the kids are."

"Fine. And on the way you can tell me exactly what type of dream you were having that involved those breathy moans that left me *aching* this morning."

"Jesus Christ. Shut up."

- X -

After having picked up Billy's car, the two teens quickly exchanged cell numbers and split up. Billy went to go see if the local mechanic could fix his windows and dents, and Dani spent her time calling around to see where the kids were at. Not one parent knew where their child was and some households, like the Byers', just didn't even answer.

Dani checked the arcade and even drove out to the mall, but there was no sight of any child she knew. And all the while she'd been looking for the kids, she kept calling her dad's phone. He still wasn't answering and that only added to Dani's building anxiety.

Around four that afternoon Dani finally gets a call from Eleven, the timid girl telling her to come to Will's house. And after receiving directions to Will's place, Dani quickly forwards them to Billy to let him know where everyone was.

She's just exited her car when the crunching of gravel can be heard down the driveway. Looking over her shoulder she sees a familiar blue Camaro slowly pull up and she waits for Billy to join her.

"See you got your car fixed."

"Yep." Billy twirls his keys in hand, slightly smirking.

Dani absentmindedly nods, she leading them up the porch. But before they can even knock, the front door opens with a bang to reveal the kids all crowded around it.

"What the shit is he doing here?" Mike Wheeler immediately snarls, glaring at Billy.

Billy tenses and Dani rolls her eyes. "Knock it off, Wheeler. We're here to help. You know damn well I told him everything last night."

"Help? Help!? How's he going to help? He gonna threaten Lucas' life again?"

"Listen here, you little shit-"

"For fuck's sake," Dani shouts, turning to glare at both Billy and Mike. "We got bigger problems than whatever the fuck happened in your past. None of you like each other, I get it. But stow the bullshit and concentrate on what's going on in the present. There's a goddamn MONSTER in town that attacked us last night and my dad is MISSING, and I don't even FUCKIN' KNOW IF HE'S ALIVE OR NOT! So stop being little bitches and work together until we either die or close whatever gate's been opened now."

Mike, Lucas, and Eleven are staring at Dani in shock, Max is staring in awe, and Billy's smirking.

"My mom's missing too," Will's meek voice pierces the following silence. "Maybe El can do something to find them?"

Dani shakily exhales, she pressing the palms of her hands to her eyes when she feels tears threatening to form. Nodding, she steps towards the door and looks at Mike. "Sorry for yelling."

He rolls his eyes. "It's fine. You're right though. We got bigger problems than your neanderthal boyfriend."

"He's not-" But Billy's snort cuts her off and she groans. "Whatever."

Can we just get on with whatever you guys are doing?"

As Dani enters with Billy at her back, Max fist bumps her and Eleven hugs her. "Sister."

"Sister," Dani's lips then twitch as she greets the younger girl.

The further they walk into the house, Billy steps as close as he can so he can murmur into her ear. "So that's the girl who can move shit with her mind?"

"Yeah. That's Eleven."

She notices Jonathan Byers and Nancy Wheeler are there as well, the two teens tensing when they see Billy. Sighing softly, she directs her friend to the opposite side of the room. By the looks of it, Billy really did a number on this group to have them so wary of him.

"Dani?" Eleven quietly addresses her. "Do you have a picture of your dad I can use?"

"Oh, umm.. would a picture on my phone work?"

"Yes."

Dani pulls her phone out, she clicking through the pics on her phone until she finds one of her dad. "Here."

Eleven takes the cellphone with careful hands, she then accepting a picture of Joyce Byers from Jonathan. Max hands her a blindfold, and with a reassuring grin towards the room's occupants Eleven then disappears into the bathroom.

Five minutes later, after sitting through the most awkward silence ever, she exits while wiping a bit blood from her nose. Mike immediately rushes to her side and Max rolls her eyes. Eleven smiles softly. "They're fine. They're in the woods doing.. I don't know what. But they're okay," she says.

"Oh thank god," Dani sighs in relief. Then smiling at Eleven, she says, "You did good, kid. Thank you."

"That's good and all," Jonathan muses, "but now we need to find the flayed. You think you can do that, El?"

The girl in question nods. "Yes. I'll be right back."

Eleven disappears back into the bathroom and Mike groans, glaring at Jonathan. Seconds turn into long, excruciating minutes and Mike starts to pace the room. Max follows after him, the two entering another room where their voices are muffled. Whatever is going on, the conversation turns heated rather quickly.

Billy glares in the direction Max disappeared, his finger twitching every time Mike's voice gets raised, and Dani nudges him. "Calm down. She can take care of herself."

The rest of the group find themselves lingering around- Will, Nancy, Lucas, and Jonathan getting into a discussion about why Eleven can't easily find 'the flayed'.

Billy looks to Dani as if she can explain what's going on to him, but she shrugs back. "I'm just as clueless as you are, buddy."

Voices raise from the back room again and suddenly Max is reappearing with Mike trailing after her.

"Okay, can you guys settle an argument for us?" She asks. "Who do you think should decide El's limits? Mike or Eleven?" She wonders with just a little sass thrown in.

Mike bristles at her tone. "The way that you frame that is such bullshit!"

"It's not bullshit, Mike. This is your whole problem and it's also precisely the reason why *she dumped your ass!*"

Nancy's eyes widen. "El dumped you?"

"Yeah, because she is conspiring against me," Mike says, pointing at Max who shakes her head at him. "She's corrupting her!"

"Oh my god," Dani murmurs, scooting closer to Billy. "I'm so glad I'm not that age anymore." He stifles a smile and goes back to watching

the tween drama unfold.

"I'm *enlightening* her," Max retorts. "The fact is, she's not yours. She's her own person, fully capable of making her own decisions."

"She's risking her life for no reason."

"For no reason?" Nancy asks incredulously. Dani cringes, as does everyone else. Well except Billy. He's too amused by what's going on. "Mike, the flayed are out there doing God knows what-

He sneers at his sister just as Lucas says, "Killing, flaying.."

Will nods. "Transforming into monsters."

"And El's not stupid," Nancy picks back up. "She's knows her abilities better than any of us."

"Exactly, thank you," Max says.

"And she is her own person," Nancy continues.

"Exactly."

"With her own free will."

"*Exactly.*"

"Oh my god, Max, if you say *exactly* one more time I'm gonna kick your ass," Billy threatens. Surprisingly, there's no heat behind his words, but they still do their job.

She glares at Billy before addressing her friends once more. "El has the saved the world twice and Mike still doesn't trust her."

"You wanna talk about trust, really?" Mike finally explodes. "After you made Eleven spy on us?"

Lucas frowns. "Wait, what?"

Whirling on his friend, Mike nods. "Oh, she didn't tell you this?"

"No."

"Your girlfriend used El's powers to spy on us!"

"His *what*?" Billy growls.

Max's eyes widen, Lucas gulps, and Dani panics. "Uhh.. so not the time, hot shot." And since they're seated on the couch together, she throws herself across Billy's lap to keep him in place. "Proceed," she flaps her hands at the children.

Max's eyes are still wide as she looks back towards her friends. Shaking her head clear, she quickly remembers what they were arguing about. "I did not make her. It was her idea. And why are we even talking about this, seriously?"

"Yeah. Who cares?" Will agrees.

"I care," Lucas retorts.

"Yeah. I guess girlfriends don't lie, they *spy*," Mike frowns

Dani scoffs. "Excuse you. Not all girlfriends spy." Billy chuckles at her offended expression, he nudging her off of him but keeping his hand on her thigh so she doesn't go too far.

"We were just joking around," Max finally defends herself.

"Would it've been so funny if I was taking a massive shit or something?"

"Gross!" Max exclaims just as Billy barks out a laugh. "You weren't."

"But what if I was?!"

Dani, Will, Nancy, and Jonathan appear one hundred percent done with this conversation already.

"I'm just trying to demonstrate how careless Max is with Eleven's powers. In fact, how careless all of you are," Mike argues. "You're treating her like some kind of machine when she's not a machine and I don't want her to die looking for the flayed when they've obviously vanished off the face of the Earth, so can we please just come up with a new plan because I love her and I can't lose her again!"

Mike, Nancy, and Max's eyes widen at what he's just confessed, Lucas and Will share small knowing grins, and Dani coos at him.

A door creaks open and Eleven enters the room, an expression of defeat etched into her features. They immediately know she didn't find what they were hoping she'd find. "What's going on?"

"Nothing," Mike's quick to say. Fortunately no one calls him out on the lie even as Eleven looks as if she doesn't quite believe him.

"Well that wasn't awkward at all," Dani drawls. Mike turns his glare on her and she smiles innocently. "So would anyone care to fill me in on what the hell is going on? My dad and the Chief checked the gate. It's closed. So where the hell are these monsters coming from?"

"I don't think it's another gate," Will quietly muses. "If a gate was opened, where are the demodogs and demogorgons besides the one that Dani and Billy saw? There'd be numerous, not just one."

Everyone glances around at one another and Jonathan perks up. "What if it's not them, but *it*," he gulps. "We got that piece of the Mindflayer itself out of Will right before Eleven closed the gate, so where did it go if not back to the Upside Down?"

"We trapped it out here with us," Nancy realizes. Every kid in the room shift uncomfortably, fear evident in their expressions. "It's infecting people, like Doris Driscoll who complained about the rats acting oddly in her basement."

"So how do we tell who's infected and not?" Dani wonders. "We're pretty much screwed here."

"Not exactly," Will says. "He doesn't like it hot. If someone is infected they're going to thrive in the cold and get agitated in the heat. He will only activate himself if we put his host in danger, so we need to put the host in extreme heat and see what happens."

"Okay, but we can't just put someone next to a heater and hope for the best."

"We actually have a hunch," Max pipes up from next to Eleven, "about a lifeguard at the pool."

"Not gonna lie, I totally had Billy pegged as the monster," Lucas murmurs to Will. His whispering voice needs much work though and Billy glares at the tween when he hears them.

Dani snorts just as everyone starts tossing out clues to look for- an aversion to heat, drastic changes in temper and/or personality, and someone who's gone missing at random for hours on end.

No one can come up with any idea of who might be possessed other than the Driscoll lady who's currently in the hospital, and eventually Billy sighs. "You might have been on to something about it being a lifeguard. Heather's been acting.. weird."

Dani frowns, this being the first time she's heard that. "Weird how?"

He shrugs. "She was one of the good ones, always on time and picking up shifts here and there when the others were slacking. A couple days ago, though, she started coming and going as she pleased. We had a date-"

Max scoffs. "Typical."

"But I cancelled," he says through gritted teeth, nose flaring at his sister's interruption. "She didn't take that too well and her insistence became annoying. She even tried cornering me in the showers one day, but I brushed her off. She set her sights on Trent then and the two have been attached at the hip since then."

"I don't see how that's weird," Mike huffs.

"Their interactions were weird, dipshit." Billy rolls his eyes, annoyed at himself for being so willing to work with these idiots. "They would share looks and it was like.. it was like they were communicating with each other, but no words were spoken."

Silence falls over the group and then Lucas claps his hands, standing to his feet and appearing ready for action. "That sounds weird enough for me. So how are we doing this with that Heather girl?"

"We can't exactly hold her hostage and use heaters like we did with Will," Nancy reluctantly admits.

"No, but what about the sauna?" Everyone looks to Dani and she grins. "There's a sauna in the weight room at the pool. Surely that could work?"

For the first time of the day, Mike smiles. "That's perfect."

"Uh, no," Lucas huffs. "The pool is too crowded. We can't trap her in the sauna with people walking around. She'll scream and attract attention!"

"Then we wait for closing time," Billy drawls. "I can go in to pick up half a shift and I'll clear the showers so Dani can teleport you guys in."

"For the last time it's not teleporting!"

"She can teleport?" Jonathan quietly asks his brother.

Will muffles his laughter and Dani groans. "Whatever."

"It's more like a portal," Max muses. "She can move in and out of shadows."

"Oh. Cool."

"Well while you guys test Heather, Jonathan and I can go check on Driscoll in the hospital. If Heather's a no-go, then maybe we can get something out of the old lady. After you guys are done at the pool, you can meet us at the hospital."

"Great." Dani stands, clapping her hands together and glancing around at the room's occupants. "Now that we got a plan, who's hungry?"

- X -

As night falls, everyone in the Byers' home is on edge. Billy had left earlier to go pick up a shift at work and he said he'd text when the coast was clear. Everyone is having quiet conversations with one another, with the exception of Dani who opted to be by herself, but as her cell phone dings with a new text message all eyes are suddenly on her.

Her stomach fills with dread as she reads it aloud. *"Pool's closing. The showers and weight room have been cleared. We're stuck cleaning up the outside so make your move now."*

"There's our cue," Nancy mutters.

Everyone's shuffling to either side of the room and Dani heads towards the other two teens her age. "Yeah. Um, Nancy? Jonathan? If it's not too much trouble, can one of you guys drop my car off at my house before heading to the hospital?"

Jonathan nods. "I can. Just give me directions."

As Dani hands over her keys, she lists off her address to Jonathan who mentions he knows where that's at. Smiling in thanks, Dani then turns towards the gathered kids. "Okay so who's first?"

"Me." Eleven steps forward. Mike tries to protest, but his friends are quick to swat him and shut him up.

With no other protests, Dani shrugs. "Okay. Give me your hand." As the girls clasp hands, Dani closes her eyes and concentrates. The lights in the room flicker before dimming, and one particular spot on the wall seems to darken immensely. Opening her eyes, Dani smiles down at Eleven. "Lets go."

Dani and Eleven walk through the wall, only to reappear in the shower room at the pool.

"Stay hidden in this last stall," Dani murmurs. "I'll be right back with Mike."

When Dani reappears in the Byers' living room, Jonathan and Nancy are staring at her in awe. She grins at them and then offers Mike her hand. One by one, Dani transfers each kid into the showers at the pool all the way across town.

Appearing with Max last, she stumbles straight into the arms of Billy as she lets go of her powers.

"You're bleeding," he tells her.

"I'm fine. It's just the power use." She wipes the blood away with the back of her hand, she then paying attention to the kids standing around. "So what's next?"

"We creep into the weight room, set up a dummy in the sauna with an attached walkie to it, and goad Heather into following it in there as we hide. When she's in the sauna or close enough, El can throw her in and we lock her in."

Dani nods at Mike. "Good. Lets get to work."

Billy actually does most of the heavy lifting, he huffing and shoving the kids out of the way when they take too long to get something done. Dani can't help but smile at him and manages to avoid Max's curious gaze, she quickly making herself useful by clearing a path for when Heather eventually appeared. Then by the time they string up the dummy and tape a walkie talkie to it, Dani and Lucas readjust the lighting in the room to make it harder to notice that's it a dummy and not an actual person waiting in the sauna.

"Okay so how do we know where Heather's at?" Billy asks. "I can't exactly go out there if she's to believe she's alone. I even parked my car around the block so she wouldn't know I was still here."

"I got it." Eleven moves to the side of the room, she sitting on the ground with her back against the wall. Mike hands her a blindfold and after having everyone go quiet she concentrates on mentally finding Heather's location. "She's in the locker room. Putting on.. fresh clothes."

"That's our cue to hide then." There's a storage closet off to the side that everyone crams into, Billy pulling Dani in with him to settle in the very back. "Okay. Now that everyone's in, Eleven's going to lure Heather this way." Mike looks between everyone, making sure they understand the plan. When he sets his sights on Dani, his lips purse before offering up the walkie talkie. "You talk. Girls hate it when other girls have what they want, right?"

"Uhh.. yes?"

"Then Heather should get pissed if you goad her by mentioning how

she was rejected by Billy."

Dani rolls her eyes and hands suddenly grasp her by the hips. Being pulled back, she finds herself pressed against Billy's front. "I like this plan," he muses.

"Of course you do. Don't go getting a big head, Hargrove," she then replies by accepting the walkie talkie from Mike.

"Which head?"

All the kids groan in disgust and Dani snorts in amusement. "Either one." Then focusing back on the kids, she grimaces. "Don't take what I say to heart. If I gotta piss off Heather, I gotta.. well I got say some stuff that's not nice or true."

"If you start moaning, I'm out of here." Max crosses her arms over her chest frowning.

"Don't worry. I'm not taking it that far."

"Okay. Everyone be quiet now." Mike huddles close to Eleven, he quietly reassuring her before her blindfold goes back on.

Silence stretches on and soon enough there's a loud bang somewhere outside. "*Pool is closed!*" Heather tries opening a door, but having been locked it's no use.

"Showtime," Billy murmurs.

Holding the walkie up to her mouth, Dani sighs before pressing the button. "Hea-ther," she singsongs. A few seconds pass before she does it again. "Hea-ther."

"*Who's there?*" She singsongs back.

Dani chuckles over the walkie, she having to blindly swat at one of the kids who starts snickering. In the silence they can hear a shower curtain getting forcefully shoved aside and then nothing. "Heather. Come and get me, you little slut."

"*You think this is funny, do you?*" Heather says, voice holding a hint of

anger at being jerked around.

Dani laughs some more. "Obviously. Now come and find me."

"If I find you, it is your funeral."

"Come and get me. Come on." Dani nods at Mike and he whispers something to Eleven, a door swinging shut to guide Heather where they want. The door to the weight room finally opens and the kids shift anxiously. "You didn't think I was going to let the fact that you hit on Billy slide, did you?" She tuts through the walkie, gulping when Billy's hands slide forward, resting on her lower abdomen. "Shame on you for thinking you could corner him alone when he was already with me."

"Danielle Lewis?" Heather muses, chuckling herself. *"I don't know what he even sees in you."*

"Easy. I don't put out on the first date."

"Bitch." A few moments of silence pass yet again and then, *"Got you."*

As Heather cackles, Dani rolls her eyes. "Come and get me, you deranged whore." The sauna door can be heard opening and Eleven whips off her blindfold. Slowly creeping out, Eleven positions herself far away enough just in case. They can hear the dummy being manhandled and one last time, Dani says, "Hey. Behind you."

"Hi," Eleven suddenly muses. She then grunts and the sound of Heather yelping can be heard.

Everyone rushes out of the closet then, Eleven waving her arm and slamming the sauna door shut. Mike and Lucas rush forward, wrapping a chain through the door handle and around some steel pipes to secure it shut as Heather starts shouting and banging from the inside.

"Holy shit." Billy saunters up behind the wall of kids, staring as Heather loses her shit inside the sauna. Will turns up the heat, steam billowing behind Heather in the room as she glares through the window. She hits either side of the window, slamming her hands against the door and rattling the chain holding it shut. "She supposed

to be that strong?"

"Only if she's possessed," Mike answers.

"Get me out of here!" Heather shouts, glaring. She's already starting to drip with sweat as she eyes up each and everyone staring at her. "Let me out." When no one moves, she tries a different tactic. "You kids.. you think that this is funny?" Heather pants as Mike and Lucas share an uneasy look. "You kids think this is some kind of sick prank, huh?" She sneers at them all. "You little assholes think this is funny?"

"Oohh. That's definitely not her," Billy drawls. "Heather isn't this hostile."

Heather's gaze then lands on Billy. "Open.. the door. Open the door, Billy. Open THE GODDAMN DOOR!" Eleven and Max jerk in fear as her fists pound against the inside of the door, each hit being more aggressive than the last.

Again no one moves and Heather disappears from sight. They can hear her palms slapping against the ground or walls, her screams resonating from within.

Will walks up to the thermostat. "We're at two twenty," he informs them.

All of a sudden Heather starts sobbing and Dani cautiously walks forward with Billy at her side. "It's not my fault. It's not my fault," she pleads. Dani and Billy frown at one another before peering in through the window only to find Heather huddled on the ground and crying. Pieces of the wall seemed to have crumbled from where she lashed out. "I promise it's not my fault, guys."

"What's not your fault, Heather?"

"I've done things.. bad things," she cries as she rocks herself back and forth. "I didn't mean to." Surprisingly, Dani's heart aches for the girl. "He made me do it," she then murmurs.

"Who made you do it?" Dani finds herself asking.

"I don't know. He's- he's like a shadow." The fear etched into

Heather's features makes Dani's own fear build. "Like a giant shadow. Please, guys. It's not me."

"What did he make you do?" Billy then asks.

Heather seems to snap, she rolling onto her side in her grief. "It's not my fault! Please! Please believe me it's not my fault."

Dani glances over her shoulders and all the kids are staring at her. "I don't know, guys. I don't feel comfortable with this anymore."

"It's a trick," Mike adamantly says. "It has to be."

Billy takes the lead then, urging Heather to tell them what's going on. She continues to whimper and cry, pleading for them to take her side. Will suddenly tenses and Dani does a double take, her stomach rolling as he shivers while touching the back of his neck.

"I feel him." Mike immediately glances down at his friend. "He's activated."

"Dani. Billy, get away from the door."

"What?" Dani asks.

Mike looks to her and screams, "Get away from the door!"

Glass shatters and Billy practically tackles Dani to the side as Heather shoves part of her upper body through the window in a rage. "Let me out, you assholes! Let me out! I'll fuckin' cut you!"

"Holy shit," Dani breathes in horrified awe.

Heather is livid and her voice is most definitely not her own. Billy rushes her back towards the kids just as Heather grabs the steel pipe they had shoved through handle, she then pushing on the door and putting pressure on the chains. Lucas, armed with a slingshot, manages to get off one shot that hits her on the cheek, she then flying back with a pained grunt.

"We need to leave. We need to leave now!" Max says.

Just as Heather starts groaning again from inside the sauna, the lights start flickering. Everyone glances up, then at Dani, and she shakes her head. "It's not me."

There's a guttural growl that has everyone tensing and suddenly Heather is throwing herself at the door. The door dents every time she hits it and Eleven bravely pushes everyone behind her. The sauna door then practically blows off its hinges and Heather stands before Eleven, panting and heaving and covered in black veins.

As Eleven and Heather stare at one another, Eleven slowly raises her right hand and with it levitates a bar and weights from the bench press. Then with a shout, Eleven flings it at Heather who catches it. But in doing so, Eleven is able to pin Heather to the wall by the neck with the bar.

The lights continue to flicker as Eleven adds more power behind her mental hold, she choking Heather to the point where the weights on the bar are digging into the brick wall. Slowly but surely Heather pushes it off as Eleven screams, and then Heather's throwing the bar back at Eleven.

Falling to protect herself, Eleven is momentarily distracted and then screams out in pain as Heather lunges forward and grasps the young girl by the back of the hair. The kids yell in shock and anger, and Heather glances up at everyone with a little grin. As she keeps her gaze locked with Mike, she grabs Eleven by the neck, chokes her, and then lifts her as if she weighs nothing.

Eleven is crying and struggling to breathe, and everyone is frozen in shock. Her eyes rolling into the back of her head is what spurs Dani into motion. "Fuck this." Grabbing a steel pipe, Dani then rushes forward and hits Heather across the back of the head. "Go to hell, you piece of shit!" Dani goes to hit her again, but Heather turns around and catches the pipe with a single hand.

Tilting her head with a feral grin, Heather then rips the pipe from Dani and backhands the girl across the room. She lands with a pained grunt and flinches when hands attempt to help her up. "That was so fuckin' stupid," Billy seethes at her.

"I didn't see you doing jack shit," she growls back. "I had to do something."

"Out, out, out!" Lucas whisper shouts, distracting them from their annoyance. "We need to get out."

Dani blinks at him and then slowly nods, she grabbing Lucas' wrist. Briefly concentrating, she finds herself in Billy's car when her eyes open once more. "Stay here."

The shadows envelop Dani and she finds herself back in the weight room. Both Eleven and Heather are screaming, but the younger girl has the possessed girl levitating up in the air.

"You next." Dani grabs onto Max and Will, her stomach rolling as she pulls two through the shadows and towards safety. She grabs onto Billy since Mike is currently behind Eleven, but just as she grabs onto Billy she makes the mistake of glancing at Heather- Heather who's staring at her with a creepy look in her eye.

"You've used too much," Billy tells her. "Your nose is bleeding."

"I don't care."

She drops Billy off and returns to the weight room just in time to see Eleven send Heather through the brick wall with a shout of anguish. Dani gulps at the show of power and Eleven sobs as she falls into Mike's waiting arms. This thing- the Mindflayer or whatever- is more than Eleven is capable of handling and it scares her. Even Mike looks terrified as he wraps his arms a little tighter around Eleven when Dani walks up to them.

"Come on. We need to go." Dani crouches and grabs onto both of them, her head aching as she gathers the shadows once more. She sluggishly blinks as the parking lot comes into view and then without warning she turns to the side and barfs. Then when she's finally got it all under control, as she's on hands on knees, Dani's arms give out and she falls flat on her face.

Everything has gone dark.

Author's Note: Did you guys see Heather being the main Flayed coming or not?

Also.. thank you, thank you, thank you for the kind reviews! :) It really makes me feel better knowing people are reading and excited for the next upcoming chapter. I recently finished chapter 9 and y'all.. let me tell you something. A scene in particular caught me off guard. It was not planned WHATSOEVER, but the song for that chapter inspired me to do it.

FYI there's a Spotify playlist for this story titled "Dani&Billy" under the username "melissawtf". I added the songs in order to coincide with the chapters so yeah.. enjoy it if you can find it.

7. Live Like Legends

Live Like Legends

*This is our time
No turning back
We could live-
We could live like legends*

When Dani finally comes to, she blinks in confusion as her dimly lit surroundings slowly come in to focus. A moment passes and then she realizes she's in Chief Hopper's cabin. There's an afghan draped haphazardly across her and she pushes it off as she sits up. Immediately her head throbs.

"Ow." Groaning, Dani rubs at her temples. "What.. the fuck."

"Told you, you used too much power." Billy saunters into the room, a small wet wash cloth in his hands. He looks entirely too good in his men's white tank top and too tight blue jeans.

Averting her gaze and her thoughts, Dani grimaces. Then realizing it's entirely too quiet in the cabin, she asks, "Where is everyone?"

"Left them at the hospital to meet the other dweebs."

"Hmm. And how long was I out? You weren't wearing what you're wearing at the pool."

Billy smirks. "You checking me out, Lewis?" She rolls her eyes and makes room for him on the couch as he gets closer. Just as he takes a seat, he tosses the wet wash cloth in her lap. "You still have blood on your face."

Frowning, Dani picks up the cloth and wipes at her nose. She's had nose bleeds before, but that was back when she was in the care of the scientists and they pushed her to her limits. But all she had were nose bleeds, never had she passed out or woke up feeling like death warmed over. "Are they okay?" She meekly asks after her face is clean.

"Are you?" Billy retorts, eyebrows raised. "Back at the pool, that was.." he trails off, sighing. "That was intense."

Thinking back on it, on how Heather reacted and at how weak they all were against her makes Dani feel small and inadequate. Tears prick her eyes and her chest aches from how she suddenly isn't breathing properly. Choking back a sob, Dani snuffles and then she shakes her head clear. "We're in way over our head here, Billy. Chief Hopper is gone, my dad is gone, and we.. we're just *kids*! What hope do we have surviving against this monster?"

"Don't bitch out on me now, Lewis." Though his words are rather harsh for her moment of vulnerability, his tone is soft. "When everyone froze as Heather was choking the kid out, you were the only one to move and do something about it."

"She's my sister. Of course I had to do something about it."

"Then do it again," he encourages her and Dani finds herself relaxing the more they talk. "This is only the beginning of whatever fight you assholes dragged me into."

Against her better judgement, she grins. "Excuse you, the *monster* dragged you into this. If I hadn't been with you that one fateful night, your ass would have been grass, Hargrove. You'd be the monster's bitch right now and not Heather."

"We'll just agree to disagree."

Dani hadn't realized just how close the two of them had gravitated towards one another and tenses when she notices he's twirling a piece of hair between his fingers. She gulps and does her best to glare when Billy realizes that she's realized how close they are, but he merely smirks back at her. His gaze darts to her lips and then back to her eyes to gauge her reaction, and Dani lets her own gaze fall to his lips. She mentally groans when she sees his tongue peek out and swipe across his bottom lip, and Dani finds herself holding her breath and leaning forward.

The front door opens with a bang and Dani immediately jerks back.

Billy closes his eyes, grumbling. "So close."

"Shut up." The kids all rush in with Jonathan and Nancy behind him- the two older teens looking quite shaken. Dani puts a bit of space between her and Billy, asking, "What happened?"

"The Mindflyer's infected more people," Nancy says. "I worked for Heather's dad. He and another co-worker of his attacked Jonathan and I at the hospital when we went looking for Driscoll."

"But we killed them. At least we thought we did," Jonathan frowns. "Their bodies.. they turned into these masses of gooey flesh and then merged into one to create some sort of creature."

"It nearly ate Nancy," Will then mutters. "But El stopped it and-"

"And totally kicked it's ass!" Lucas whoops.

Max rolls her eyes, punching at her friend. "It still got away. They're.. unkillable."

"So what we need now is to find the Mindflyer itself. Or at least the first person it possessed to see where it's taking it's victims," Mike informs her.

Dani thinks for a moment and then says, "Brimborn Steel Works."

He blinks at her. "What?"

"When Billy and I were attacked, that's where it was. I remember we picked up his car the following morning and it was in front of that abandoned steel works building."

There's a moment where everyone is quiet and then Mike explodes. "Are you *fucking* shitting me!"

"Mike, language!" His sister is quick scold him.

"We've been overworking El all this time trying to find where this thing is and you already knew?!"

Dani gapes, flinching under the kid's heated stare. "I didn't- we were

busy! It's been non-stop and I don't know why I didn't realize sooner, but-

Mike sneers at her. "Some help you are."

"Hey!" Billy barks, blue eyes going steely as he quickly pushes himself up to his feet. Nancy and Jonathan tense, and Nancy reaches to pull her little brother back. "We're doing the best we can with what little we know, you little shit. If you and everyone else would pull your heads out of your asses to come up with a solid plan, maybe your little girlfriend wouldn't be working herself to death to save our asses!"

"Oh I'm a little shit? *I'm* a little shit?!" Mike raises his voice and Dani quickly stands, grabbing Billy by the arm when his fists clench. "That's funny coming from you."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

"Mike.." Max breathes, shaking her head. "Drop it."

Billy glares at his step-sister, nostrils flaring. Dani doesn't know all that went on between the step-siblings, but from what little she could piece together she knew it wasn't good. But that was their business, and since she's been in Hawkins she's never seen the side of Billy she's heard horror stories of.

"The next time you come at me, kid or not, I'm gonna knock your goddamn head off your shoulders," Billy warns him. "You want so badly to be angry at everyone else for letting harm come to Dani's *sister*, but it's funny how the only person who made a move to even help the kid came from Dani and not you. You were too busy cowering and making your little girlfriend save your ass."

The room is deathly quiet and Mike's features shift in his anger at being told off. He can't come up with a reply and eventually backs down when Eleven grabs his hand. Shaking her head at him, Mike completely deflates.

"Yeah. That's what I thought." Billy stalks off, disappearing into another room of the cabin.

Dani exhales loudly, her breath having caught at the intensity in which Billy defended her. "I'll, uh, I'll just go check on him." She catches Max's eye before she flees the room and the red head offers her a nod of thanks.

As she walks off to go find her overheated friend, she finds him pacing back and forth in the back bedroom. From the looks of it, and knowing that only two people live in the cabin, she realizes it's Chief Hopper's room. Entering the room with a sigh, she closes the hanging sheet that acts as a door to offer them a semblance of privacy.

"Hey, are you-"

Billy cuts her off by whirling on her, his expression still contorted with the anger from yelling at Mike. She's only just steeled herself before he's crowding her against the wall, and Dani barely manages to keep a yelp at bay when his hands reach down and grasp at the back of her thighs to lift her up. Her hands automatically find purchase on his shoulders and she stares down at him surprise.

"Well would you look at that? Someone isn't as grossed out by me as she likes to pretend."

The anger disappears in an instant and in its place is his all too familiar smirk. Dani huffs and feels herself surprisingly relaxing, chuckling quietly while letting her hands slide up and over his shoulders so her fingers tangle together at the back of his neck. Feeling bold, she wraps her legs securely around Billy's waist and this time it's Dani's turn to smirk. "Don't play dumb, Hargrove. You know what those pretty eyes of yours does to the female population of Hawkins." Then lowering her face and voice, she stops just shy of actually pressing her lips to his. "If you're gonna play, Billy, then play. But just know I'm not fucking you with the kids just on the other side of this sheet."

Immediately closing the gap between their lips, Billy's chaste kiss is hard. Dani angles her head to the right and slightly parts her lips, she letting the tip of her tongue flick against his bottom lip. Billy returns with a bite and Dani groans, she digging her nails into the back of his neck in retaliation.

Panting and heaving after just a few moments of tongues tasting one another, Billy manages to carry Dani over to the bed and drop her there. She swallows hard as she scoots up the bed, her heated gaze never leaving that of Billy's. She lays there, resting her weight on her elbows and pulling up her legs to bend at the knees. Her knees partially fall open and Billy wastes no time in fitting himself between them with a mumbled, "Fuck."

Holding himself up with his hands bunched into the sheets on either side of her head, Dani laughs at his eagerness- laughter which he quickly smothers. Kissing Billy is and is not exactly what Dani expected, but she finds that she likes it. In fact she likes it so much that she finds herself rolling them, surprising Billy as she ends up on top of him. Sitting up and panting, Dani's hands clench Billy's shirt as she stares down at him. Flipping her hair over her shoulder, she leans back down and languidly presses her lips to his once more.

Billy immediately tries to deepen the kiss and Dani lets him, she breaking it with a muffled moan after a few moments to trail biting kisses down his neck. Billy's hands grip either sides of her waist and nudges her down his body until she rubs against the newly formed bulge in his jeans.

Dani loudly moans before she can smother it and the both of them freeze, her eyes widening in horror. Billy's eyes suddenly take on a glint of amusement and she glares down at him as he continues to guide her hips back and forth over him. Her eyes flutter, but she's quick to shake her head clear and punch his chest. "Stop it. You're gonna get us caught."

"Me get us caught?" His thumbs rub up and down her hips, and Dani swats his hands away.

"Stop that!" She hisses. Then climbing off and dropping into the spot beside him, she pokes him in the ribs. "Now's not the time for this."

"I don't know. You seemed pretty on board just seconds ago."

"My mind was in a haze, dick. Now you better get rid of that," she says while gesturing to his hard-on, "before one of the kids walks back here."

"Easier said than done, sweetheart."

"Mhm. Just think about whose bed you're in right now. Chief Hopper's." Billy grimaces and Dani smiles wide. "Yeah. That's what I thought." He sits up and climbs out of the bed, and Dani lays down with small smirk. Sighing, she makes herself comfortable and lets her eyes droop closed. "Wake me up when they figure out a useful plan. I need to recuperate since portaling that many people through the shadows took a toll."

- X -

Dani jerks awake, eyes blinking rapidly as she tries to figure out what exactly woke her. The room is still dark, colder than it was before, and her heart is beating furiously.

"Billy?" She sits up, scooting out of bed and patting down her hair. Glancing around, the stillness and quietness of the cabin sets her on edge. Frowning, she calls out once again. "Billy?"

Dani walks towards the door and shoves the curtain open.. only to have a petite hand shoot forward and wrap around her throat. Her eyes widen at the sight of a sickly looking Heather and she immediately starts clawing at the hand on her throat.

"MIKE!" Eleven's voice suddenly pierces the air.

Heather wickedly smirks at the sound of the girl's panic. "N-No!" Dani rasps, shoving at Heather and trying to dislodge herself from the monster in order to get to Eleven. But Heather merely turns Dani around with a forceful push, her hand then wrapping in Dani's hair as she marches Dani down the hall and towards the front room.

"He can't hear you," Heather taunts. When they emerge into the front room, Eleven's scared gaze darts between Dani and the monster at Dani's back. "You shouldn't have looked for me."

Heather tosses Dani at Eleven's feet and she quickly scrambles up, making sure Eleven is okay before placing herself in front of the younger girl.

Heather tuts at them before dropping her gaze to Eleven. "Because

now I see you. I see *both* of you," she says, her voice resonating oddly around the room. As Heather walks further into the room, Dani pushes Eleven back. "Now we can all see you."

Eleven sobs in fear and Dani reaches back, grabbing the girl's hand in her own.

"You," Heather points at Eleven, "let us in and now you are going to have to let us stay."

"No," she whimpers.

"Don't you see? All this time we've been building it. We've been building it.. for you."

Eleven sobs some more just as her back hits the table and Dani hurriedly drags her around it to keep as much space between them and the monster gaining on them.

"All that work? All that pain? All of it.. for you. And now it's time. Time to end it. And we're going to end you."

"Like hell you are!" Dani snaps.

"And when you're gone, we're going to end your friends."

"No," Eleven cries.

"And then we're going to end everyone."

Eleven steels herself, flinging her hand up. "Get away!" She screams and sends Heather flying back with the force of her power.

"Nooo!"

Dani jerks awake, really awake this time, and scrambles out of bed. Billy, who'd been smoking a cigarette by the opened window, startles in surprise and doesn't hesitate to rush after her. Someone is screaming in the front room, mixed in with the sounds of everyone's panic at not knowing what's going on.

The moment they enter the room, Eleven flings herself from Mike's

arms and into Dani's. The two girls fiercely hug one another, sobbing as they sink to the floor together.

"What the hell is going on?" Billy asks.

Max shrugs, eyes wide. "We don't know. El went under to find Heather and then all of a sudden she started screaming."

He frowns. "Dani was sleeping. She woke up at the same moment Eleven started flipping out."

Everyone glances at the girls then, not exactly sure how to approach them while they're like this. They all hesitantly take seats, waiting it out as the girls' sobs quiet down until they're nothing but sniffles and then hiccups. Mike and Max are the two to go to the girls when they've finally accepted whatever it is that happened to them, Mike helping Eleven to her feet and Max helping Dani.

Dani and Eleven are then led to the couch where they're gently pushed down to take seats, and Dani immediately wraps an arm around Eleven's shoulders. Just as Eleven sinks into her embrace, loud bangs and crackles echo throughout the forest, and the girls jump in fear.

"It's okay! It's okay," Jonathan soothes them. "It's just fireworks from the fair."

Dani nods and relaxes once more, and then Nancy appears with two glasses of water for the two shaken girls. They both manage faint smiles of gratitude and slowly sip as they try to collect their thoughts.

"He said.. he was building something," Eleven quietly informs them without prompt. "That it was all for me."

Max looks around in confusion. "Building something? Is he talking about the flayed?"

Nancy nods. "He has to be."

"So he's building an army just like we thought," Lucas realizes.

"Yeah, but he's not building this army to spread," Mike says.

"He's building it stop Eleven." Dani frowns at Will who'd spoken, she tightening her arm around the girl's shoulders.

Mike nods and continues. "Last year El closed the gate on him. I have a feeling that really pissed him off."

"Royally pissed him off," Dani mutters.

"And the Mindflyer now knows that she's the only thing that can stop him."

"But he's interested in Dani too," Eleven says. "I don't know how, but he pulled her into the.. mind room with me."

Billy stands a little taller at that piece of information and Dani shakes her head at him. "I'm fine. When he took over Heather during the sauna test, he saw me portaling everyone out. He's intrigued, I think, but his main concern is El."

"And with El out of the way-"

"Game over."

"He also said he was gonna kill all of you," she tells them. Every teen in the room looks startled.

"Yeah well that's nice." Max's sass earns a small grin from Billy which he's quick to mask.

Nancy suddenly pushes off the wall and walks to one of the windows. A moment passes and then, "Do you guys hear that?"

Dani's heart immediately beats double.

"It's just the fireworks," Jonathan tries to assure everyone.

"Heather," Nancy then turns around, gaze on Dani and Eleven. "When she told you this, was it here? In this room?" Dani and Eleven hesitantly nod, and everyone suddenly tenses as they start glancing around.

Will slowly reaches up with his right hand, his hand going to the

back of his neck. "He knows we're here," he says.

Jonathan and Billy immediately make a beeline for the door, everyone else scrambling to follow them. They rush out the cabin and down the porch steps, walking all the way to where the cars are parked. Fireworks are going off in the distance, and the largest creature they've seen yet is stomping down the road that leads to the cabin.

"Get inside," Billy grits out. "Get inside now and start barricading the windows!"

The kids all rush back inside, Billy urging Dani to go with them. He, Nancy, and Jonathan make a run for the shed, looking for any available weapon. Billy immediately grabs up a machete and an axe, he weighing both in his hands before tossing Jonathan the axe. Byers nods in thanks as Billy twirls the machete in hand and Nancy quickly scours the shed for anything else. Pulling down a tarp, she comes across a shotgun. In a nearby drawer she produces several shells for it.

"You sure you know how to use that, Princess?" Nancy glances over at him, cocking the shotgun in hand. Billy smirks. "Good to know."

The three rush back into the cabin, they helping the kids barricade the weakest points of the room. Once done, everyone stands in the middle of the living room and glances around. Just what was taking the Mindflayer so long?

Feeling a nudge, Dani turns around and finds Billy at her back. "You good?"

She grins at him. "Yeah. You?"

He scoffs. "Ask me again if we make it out of this alive."

The lights start dimming as if there's a power surge and Dani immediately blurts, "That's not me."

Something- a tentacle of sorts- breaks through a wall by the bookshelf. Everyone scatters in fear, screaming, and the end of the tentacle moves until it's right in front of Eleven as she tries to shield

her friends. Jonathan rushes forward, swinging the axe and hitting it twice before the tentacle knocks him clear across the room. The tentacle follows him, the end opening wide to show off some gnarly sharp teeth as Jonathan tries to practically become one with the wall in order to get away.

On instinct Dani gathers the shadows, she falling to the ground and rolling into the wall at her back.. only to come up behind Jonathan. Hugging him from behind, she quickly rolls him back into the shadows she'd just come from.

Nancy shoots once and then twice as Dani reappears with Jonathan, he looking at Dani with wide eyes. "T-Thanks."

"You're welcome."

Nancy shoots a third time, the tentacle a little more than pissed off at her. She goes to shoot a fourth time, but the shotgun clicks empty. She stares at the gun, then at the tentacle as she scurries backwards in fear, and before Dani can shadow travel to save her.. Eleven is stopping the wayward tentacle just inches from Nancy's face.

Eleven stands with her feet shoulders width apart, one arm held out as she keeps the tentacle at bay with nothing but her mind. The tentacle starts to quiver and then shake uncontrollably, and when Eleven flings her arm downward the tentacle is cut. There's a bunch of squealing as the tentacle disappears from where it'd come, Billy then shouting at Max since she was standing too close to the gaping hole.

"Holy shit."

Another tentacle breaks through another wall, everyone ducking as it makes a beeline for Eleven. She catches it with her powers about a foot in front of her, surprised, and another tentacle explodes through the windows. With two hands spread out and keeping the tentacles from reaching her, Eleven pants and heaves in anger. With a shout, she forcefully brings her arms inward and rips the tentacles apart again.

The tentacles disappear and they're not even granted an ounce of

relief as the roof is then ripped open. The Mindflayer roars, it's mouth opening wide in a rage.

"Fuck me," Dani remarks.

A tentacle from the Mindflayer's mouth shoots down and catches Eleven by the ankle. Pulling, it knocks her off her feet and drags her across the floor on her stomach. As she screams, clawing at the floor for any sort of purchase, Dani lunges forward and catches one of Eleven's arms. She struggles to keep Eleven in the room as the Mindflayer tugs on her, and then Jonathan's lunging forward to grab onto Eleven's other arm.

Everyone else finally moves, Billy tossing aside his machete and grabbing onto Eleven's arm right above where Dani has latched on. Mike helps Jonathan, Max grabs onto Dani's waist and Will onto his brother's.

Lucas glances around, not knowing what to do with himself when Jonathan screams, "Nancy, shoot it!"

Nancy's hurrying to reload the shotgun as Eleven screams in pain and terror. Dani screams as well when she loses her footing by trying to pull with all her might. The Mindflayer is stronger than them all and it's absolutely terrifying.

A gunshot finally rings out, followed by a second and then a third. But all Nancy does is manage to piss the creature off.

"Dani, portal us out!" Mike shouts. "Portal us out, portal us out, portal us out!"

"I can't! Not like this!"

Billy yells just as lets go and turns around to pick up the machete he'd previously abandoned. Then marching up to the tentacle, he swings the machete with all his might. The monster squeals as the blade lodges in it, Billy then yanking it out and striking it again. Looking at the kids, he shouts, "Someone pick up that fucking axe!"

Lucas scrambles to do just that and with a terse nod from Billy, both Billy and Lucas work in tandem as they strike the tentacle holding

onto Eleven. After several strikes they sever the tentacle and Eleven collapses on everyone who'd been holding onto her.

Eleven whimpers in pain and Mike wastes no time in yanking the piece of the Mindflyer that had stayed latched onto her ankle. She screams in agony, but immediately quiets down when she's free of it's teeth once and for all.

Dani is cradling Eleven in her arms, but then the Mindflyer is roaring once more. It hovers it's face just above the hole in the roof and Eleven pushes herself up to her feet. Glaring and limping, Eleven walks right underneath the hole. She holds her arms up, hands and fingers pointed at the Mindflyer. It roars, Eleven screams, and then with a mighty pull of her hands outwards.. Eleven rips the face of the Mindflyer in half.

The group is stunned speechless before Jonathan gathers his wits. "Go, go, go!"

Jonathan and Nancy scoop up Eleven from where she had collapsed to the floor, Billy then shoving the other kids towards the exit. He holds onto Max with one hand as she tries to scurry by and then reaches for Dani's hand when she's close enough. With the Mindflyer momentarily out of the fight, everyone rushes towards the only two vehicles.

Jonathan loads Eleven into the back seat of Nancy's station wagon while Mike and Will climb in with her. Nancy gets behind the wheel and Jonathan jumps into the passenger seat. Dani doesn't say anything when she realizes it's her car that Billy is shoving Max and Lucas into the back seat of, and she quickly jumps into the passenger seat since she didn't have any keys on her. As soon as Billy plops into the driver's seat, the engine roars to life and he's speeding after Nancy.

With the Mindflyer still back at the cabin, the car's occupants are allowed a moment to breathe.

"Not that it's totally important right now," Dani pants, attempting to catch her breath, "but how the fuck did my car get here when we were using yours earlier?"

Keeping his gaze straight ahead and occasionally checking the rear view mirror, Billy lightly smirks. "My baby's been through too much already. I dropped off my car at your house and picked up yours."

Just as he takes a too sharp turn, Dani slams into the door with a grunt. Billy huffs a laugh at her and she glares at his side profile while rubbing her elbow. "Dick."

8. Glitter and Gold

Glitter and Gold

*I am flesh and I am bone
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter and gold
I've got fire in my soul
Rise up, ting ting, like glitter*

The two cars end up screeching to halts at the local supermarket, the tense atmosphere of the Dani's car breaking when Billy whistles lowly at the sight of Nancy swinging the car into park. He drawls about there being more to the Wheeler girl than he originally thought and Dani grins over her shoulder at him as she opens her door.

"I know. I totally have a girl crush on her."

Just as Max and Lucas scramble out from the back seat, glass shatters and everyone whirls around to see Nancy leading the group into the store through the now broken door.

Inside, Dani finds them down the aisle where all the first aide supplies are.

"Okay. Get her down," Nancy says. Jonathan and Mike, who'd been helping Eleven limp along, sit her on the floor. "Okay. Let me see."

Nancy squats down pushes Eleven's bloodied pant leg up, blood gushing from Eleven's wound as she whimpers in pain.

"Shit." Max's eyes widen. Nancy starts to open a gauze packet and a bottle of rubbing alcohol, but Max stops her. "Whoa, whoa, hey. What are you doing?"

"I'm cleaning the wound."

"No. First we need to stop the bleeding, then clean, then disinfect, *then* bandage." Nancy and Jonathan stare at the red head, not sure just how correct she is. Max glances around self consciously before she rolls her eyes. "I skateboard. Trust me."

Billy grunts. "She's right."

Max stares at him in surprise for backing her up before snapping out of it, she grabbing a piece of gauze herself and laying it on Eleven's wound. "Mike, hold this. Keep the pressure on it nice and firm, okay?" Then looking around at her other friends, she says, "We're gonna need water and soap."

"Yeah. Okay." Nancy and Jonathan get up, disappearing around the corner.

Lucas wiggles out of his backpack, he unzipping it and dumping out all it's contents. Max turns around at the sound, her brow furrowing. "Does any of this help?" He asks.

"No. Go get me wash cloths and a bowl."

"A bowl?"

"Lucas," she groans.

Will slaps Lucas' arm. "Come on."

"Okay. Okay."

Left alone with Billy, Dani squats down near Max and reaches for Eleven's hand to squeeze in comfort. "What do you need us to do?"

Max purses her lips before glancing up at Billy. "Uhh.. nothing. We have everything covered, I think." But apparently she doesn't because in the next moment she's standing up and running out of the aisle.

Rolling her eyes with a small smile, Dani sits next to Eleven and doesn't let go of her hand. Mike sits in front of them, keeping pressure on Eleven's wound, and Billy plops down next to Dani with a tired sigh.

"How are you holding up?" Dani asks her.

Eleven smiles tiredly. "Fine."

"How's the pain?" Mike then asks.

"Hmm, not bad."

"You're gonna have an awesome scar," he then says, smiling at her in reassurance. "You'll look even more bad ass."

"Bitchin'," she muses, grinning.

Dani laughs and Mike immediately nods. "Yeah. *Bitchin'*."

"Oh my god. You guys are so adorable," Dani coos. Mike grimaces and Eleven giggles.

The two avert their gazes, but eventually Mike looks at Dani. "Uh, can I have a moment alone with El, please?"

"Oh. Uh, yeah. Sure."

Dani stands, but Billy remains seated. His eyes narrow at Mike. "What do you need a moment alone with the kid for?"

Mike's eyes widen at Billy's sudden interest and Dani chuckles at the situation. "Leave them alone, idiot. Come on. Lets go steal some food. I'm hungry."

Billy continues to stare at Mike rather suspiciously until he relents, he standing up and walking out of the aisle before Dani. Just as Dani turns her back, however, one of their walkie talkies comes to life. It's mostly static, but there are some garbled words in there. Mike shrugs it off, so Dani leaves it be.

Turning the corner, Dani rushes down the aisle next to the one she'd just exited and keeps as quiet as possible. Billy sighs when he realizes what she's doing. She's eavesdropping.

"I like that you and Max are friends now," she overhears Mike telling Eleven. "It's just.. I was jealous, at first, and angry. And that's why I said all that stupid stuff. And it's like I wanted you all to myself."

Quietly squealing, Dani jerks when Billy grabs her by the waist and pulls her flush against his chest. "What are you doing?" He murmurs right next to her ear.

"Shh. I think he's confessing his love for her. It's so fucking adorable."

She can practically hear Billy's eyes roll, but she figures he's not too upset about given his arms have snaked low around her waist. He's hugging her to him, his chin resting on her shoulder as they listen together.

"I'm sorry," they hear Mike say now. "I just- I never felt like this, you know, with anyone before. And.." he trails off, sighing. "They do say *it* makes you crazy."

"What makes you crazy?" Eleven wonders.

Dani gasps, slapping a hand over her mouth to keep her excitement at bay.

"You never- you never heard that term?" He stammers. "You know, that phrase *blank* makes you crazy? Like the word?"

"Girlfriends?" Billy snorts at such an innocent answer and Dani elbows him in retaliation.

"No, no, no. Not girlfriends."

"Boyfriend," she says, matter of factly.

"No! No, no. Not boyfriends either. It's like- it's like a feeling."

Mike stammers, trying to come up with a way to explain without actually saying the one word he's looking for. Billy sighs, Dani mentally groans, and she just- she can't take it anymore.

"Old people say it to each other sometimes."

"Old people?"

"Yeah! What I want to say is.. that I.. I just.. I know that I-"

"Oh for fuck's sake," Dani mumbles. "He **LOVES** you!" She then shouts.

"Dani!"

Billy barks out a sharp laugh, and before Mike can lecture them about privacy the walkie talkie comes to life once more. "*Do.. you copy? I repeat.. co- red!*"

Dani's smile slowly falls as she hears Mike frantically calls out to his friend. "Dustin? Dustin, this is Mike. Do you copy?"

"Who the fuck is Dustin?" Billy asks.

"He's the weird one my dad is oddly fond of," Dani says. "Come on."

Dani and Billy return to the previous aisle as the others come running up.

"*Scoops.. underground.. ru.. another gate!*"

"Did he just say there's another gate?!" Lucas freaks.

"*..extraction now! Do.. copy?!*"

"We copy," Mike replies. "Tell us where you are! I repeat, tell us where you are!"

Dustin tries to come through one more time, but his walkie completely cuts out. Mike attempts to reach him again, but it's no use.

Eleven's voice pierces the following the silence. "I can find him."

"Uh, you can find him after your leg is patched up," Dani tells her. Eleven glances at her in surprise, but offers her a small smile when she sees Dani narrowing her eyes. "I'm not joking. We're in the clear from the Mindlayer for now so long as you don't attempt to find it while looking for Dustin. Get that leg fixed and then find Henderson."

"Okay."

"And while she's getting patched up, you need to redo the bandages on your arm," Billy tells her, earning amused glances from all around when Dani scoffs at him. "They've bled through."

She glances at her arm and sighs. "Dammit. They must have opened

up when I stopped, dropped, and rolled to save Johnny boy over there."

Jonathan tosses her a weak glare as Nancy muffles her giggles. They get to work on Eleven's leg as Dani starts removing her own bandages, Billy taking the lead on helping her. When he produces a bottle of rubbing alcohol and pours it on her claw marks before she can protest, Dani yelps and punches out at him, she blowing on her arm and trying to fan air on it to soothe the pain as her eyes water.

"You fuckin' asshole! You're supposed to warn me!"

Billy rolls his eyes and grabs her arm to drag her closer once more. "You're gonna have an awesome scar," he mocks, glancing at Mike. "You'll look even more bad ass."

The words sound familiar and Dani knows where she's heard them from when Mike sneers over at Billy. "I liked it better when you were an asshole and Dani wasn't trying to get into your pants."

"Hey!" She barks as Billy chuckles even more. "Uncalled for, man. And besides, it's the other way around. He's trying to get into mine."

"A few more minutes back at the cabin and I'd have succeeded."

"Gross!" Max yelps. "Can you guys not do whatever this is in front of us?" She asks, her expression uncomfortable at the leer Billy is offering Dani.

Rolling his eyes, Billy slaps a bandage on Dani's arm, making her grumble as Will cautiously steps forward to tape it up. She flashes him a smile, which the kid returns, and then Dani glares at Billy as he winks at her. She eventually huffs a laugh and the two remain next to one another as the others help Eleven to her feet and lead her to another aisle.

Watching as Eleven sits in front of a bunch of freezers as Mike hurriedly opens all the doors, Dani quickly realizes what's going on as Will hands the girl an American flag blindfold.

As everyone else finds a seat nearby, Billy sits on a crate and drags Dani to sit on his knee. She goes without a fight and drapes her arm

around his shoulders to better get comfortable. "Is this normal?" He mumbles.

"Yeah. The buzzing of the freezers help her concentrate to get in whatever mind space she needs to find someone."

It's eerily quiet as Eleven goes under, the sound of a soda can cracking open shattering the silence.

Lucas has opened a can of Coke and Max glares at him. "Quiet!"

"Oh. Sorry." He slurps his first sip and his friends look on in mild annoyance.

"How do you even drink that?" Mike then asks.

Lucas shrugs, attempting to keep his voice low. "Because it's delicious."

Dani nods. "Agreed."

"What?" Mike and Max look equally disgusted.

"It's like Carpenter's The Thing. The original is a classic, no question about it. But the remake?" Lucas grins, slurping his drink once again. He sighs in contentment once he's done, smacking his lips. "Sweeter. Bolder. Better."

Mike shakes his head. "You're insane."

"So you prefer the original Thing?"

"What? No, I'm not talking about The Thing," Mike retorts. "I'm talking about new Coke."

"It's the same concept, dude."

"Uh, actually it's not the same concept."

"It is!"

"Are these two serious right now?" Billy deadpans.

Dani sighs. "I'm afraid so."

Mike and Lucas get a little more heated in their back and forth, and Eleven finally snaps. "Hey!" She pulls off her blindfold, blood trickling out of her nose. "I found them. Lets go."

"Them?" Nancy asks. "Who's them?"

"Dustin, Steve, and two girls I don't know. They're in trouble."

Billy tenses. "Please tell me she's not talking about Harrington?"

"Sorry, hot shot, but I'm pretty sure she is. He knows all about the Upside Down stuff too," Dani tells him.

Billy sighs, but doesn't say anything else on it. He taps her on the butt and Dani takes the hint to stand, but before they can even head for the exit Lucas stalls them. He and Will rush out of the aisle, only to return a few moments later with a cart loaded with the largest fireworks they could find.

"Just.. trust us," Lucas grins. "You'll be glad we're taking these if we end up needing them for the Mindflayer."

No one argues and then all too soon everyone is rushing back for their vehicles.

"Starcourt mall," Eleven says just as Dani and Billy split for her car. "That's where Dustin is."

"Got it, kid. Be careful."

Max and Lucas opt to go with the others this time which doesn't bother Billy or Dani in the slightest. Both vehicles peel out of the vacant parking lot and Billy pulls ahead fairly quickly. The roads are all eerily empty and none of this is sitting right with Dani.

"How the hell is this town not evacuating?" She wonders. Billy's hands tighten on the steering wheel as he presses a little harder on the gas. "Surely someone's seen that damn monster walking around. It's huge!"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Billy says. "I said it once and I'll say it again- this place is a shithole. Of course the locals are all fuckin' clueless."

"I wish I'd have known that beforehand," Dani grumbles. "Maybe then I'd be somewhere else living a normal life."

"Full offense, sweetheart, but you're a child experiment. There is no normal life for you." Dani sighs, knowing he's right. "And besides, if you hadn't come here I'd be bored to tears and sleeping with Mrs. Wheeler."

Dani snorts, she reaching out and swatting his arm as he grins. "You're terrible. Now drive faster."

"Yes, ma'am."

Billy drives even faster, losing Nancy's station wagon in the rear view mirror. Soon enough they're pulling into the vacant parking lot of the mall. They stay in Dani's car, waiting for the others, and only when they pull up do they finally exit.

"There's bad men with guns," is the first thing Eleven says. "We need to surprise them from upstairs, but-"

"But the bad men are all downstairs, I take it?" At Eleven's nod, Dani sighs. "Okay. I'm on it. We're lucky I've visited this place a few times already."

The group all jog over to the side of the mall where it's the darkest and Dani shakes her arms out at her sides. They're running short on time, so Dani concentrates particularly hard and ignores the headache that instantly blooms. The shadows easily form a small portal big enough for one person, but as Dani's eyes snap open.. the shadowed portal grows outward.

"Whoa, whoa, whoa." Billy grabs Dani by the chin even as she never lets her eyes leave the wall before them. "Stop. You're bleeding."

"Not yet. Take my hand." Billy reluctantly does as he's told and then Dani grabs Eleven's hand with her free one. "Everyone hold hands. Make one chain with me in the middle."

Hands are quickly clasped and then when Dani tells them to 'go', they walk into the side wall and come out in the Foot Locker that was located on the second floor. Hands drops immediately and everyone's following after Eleven.

Lagging behind, Dani wipes her nose with the back of her hand. She takes a step, stumbles, and Billy catches her with a glare. "I told you."

"Shut up. I had to do it. Lets just go."

Billy holds most of her weight as they take their leave and a car alarm suddenly blaring has them speeding up. They stop with the others as they stand back, Eleven standing near the railing that overlooks the bottom floor. Her arm is held out as she concentrates on something below, and then with a shout she pulls her arm in towards her before thrusting it out quickly. There's a loud crash before all noise ceases and as Eleven stands a little taller the rest of the group joins her.

Down below, a car's been thrown and there are several dead men scattered about. In one of the fast food joints are four faces peering over the counter, three of them familiar to Dani who huffs a quiet laugh as she smiles down at them.

It's a mad dash to get downstairs, Billy still helping Dani and Mike helping Eleven. Then when they're all on the bottom floor, Dustin rushes up to his friends with a toothy smile.

"You flung that thing like hot wheel!" He laughs, hugging Eleven and Mike.

"Lucas?!" A really young black girl exclaims.

Lucas' eyes widen. "What are you doing here?!"

"Ask them," she says, gesturing to Steve and Robin. "It's their fault."

"True." Steve doesn't even deny it. "It's absolutely our fault."

"Of course it is," Billy drawls. Steve frowns at him, but doesn't rise to the bait. He does, however, frown at the closeness between him and Dani.

"I don't understand what happened to that car," Robin suddenly muses.

Dustin gestures to his friend. "El has superpowers. Dani too," he then amends when he notices her. "Hey, Dani."

"Dustin," she chuckles softly. "Nice to see you're still alive. And Steve.. what the fuck happened to you? You were totally prettier before." Billy grunts and tightens his hold on her.

"Wait, that's El?" Erica, Lucas' apparent sister asks, eyes bright.

Robin glances around in confusion. "Wait, who's El?"

"I'm sorry, but who are you?" Nancy asks, a little suspiciously.

"That's Robin," Dani smiles. "She's totally cool. Works with Steve."

"She even cracked the top secret code," Dustin tells them.

"Yeah, which is how we found out about the Russians in the first place?"

"Russians?" Jonathan asks, flabbergasted. "What Russians?"

"The Russians!" Steve gestures to the dead men.

Max scoffs. "Those were Russians?"

Dani glances around at the group, lips down turning. "I'm too tired for this shit." She leans further into Billy, letting her eyes droop shut. "Nudge me awake when we figure out our next plan of action."

Everyone's still talking in a circle, arguing almost, and Dani is just done. She hears them mention the Russian's again, code reds, and low batteries. But the thing that makes her jolt back awake is Mike suddenly yelling for Eleven.

Eleven has collapsed, and she looks extremely pale and is sweating profusely. She's reaching for her leg while whimpering in pain and Jonathan, who's near her legs, lifts her pant leg. Underneath the bandage is an infection.. an infection that suddenly has something

moving beneath her flesh.

"Oh I think I'm going to be sick." Dani immediately drops above Eleven's head, she moving the girl's head onto her knees while grabbing her hands. The thing in her leg moves again and suddenly Eleven is screaming.

"Jesus Christ," Dustin mumbles.

Whatever is in her leg keeps squirming around, Eleven's screaming in agony, and Jonathan suddenly climbs to her feet. "Keep her talking. Keep her awake!"

"Where are you going?" Erica calls after him, but he pays her no mind.

"Okay, okay. Shhh." Dani tells Eleven. She lets go of her hands, smoothing Eleven's hair from her sweaty face. "We're going to get this thing out and it'll be fine. Just hang in there a little bit longer, El. Just a little bit longer."

"Sister," she whimpers. "It hurts."

"I know, I know." Dani's eyes tear up. "I'm so sorry you have to go through this."

Jonathan quickly returns with a knife and wooden spoon in hand. "Hey, El, this is going to hurt like hell. Okay?"

Dani blanches as everyone else grimaces. Things were about to get really bloody.

"Okay," she cries.

Jonathan puts on some gloves before offering her the wooden spoon. "You're gonna wanna bite down on this."

Once Eleven has the wooden handle situated between her teeth, Jonathan grabs her leg in his hand and hovers the tip of the blade over Eleven's infected leg. The thing is still moving underneath.. and he hesitates.

"Don't be a pussy, Byers. Do it!" Billy snaps.

Jonathan grimaces as the blade then penetrates flesh, he cutting slowly as Eleven's muffled screams pierce the air. He reopens the gash since it had started to close, and then sets the blade down. Closing his eyes, he inhales deeply before he digs into the wound with his fingers.

Eleven screams again as he he continues to dig to catch whatever creature was in her leg, but she can't take it. Spitting the spoon out of her mouth, she screams, "Stop it! Stop! Stop!"

Billy pushes Jonathan by the shoulder and shakes his head when Jonathan stares at him in surprise. "Stop, man."

"I'll do it," Eleven whimpers.

Dani helps her sit up and Eleven holds her hand above her leg. Fingers tensed, Eleven grunts and groans and screams. The creature in her leg moves around some more before the gash on her leg opens up even wider, she then screaming even louder as a slug-like creature pops it's heads up. The lights flicker and glass shatters all around them, and then Eleven flings the creature as far away from her as she can. It starts to crawl away and the group look on dejectedly, but then a boot's stomping on it and splattering it.

The adults have finally arrived.

Joyce Byers, Nathan Lewis, Jim Hopper, and another male individual stare at the children with varying expressions.

"Dad," Dani sighs in relief. She's quick to scramble to her feet, she rushing for her dad and wrapping him up in the tightest embrace she's capable of. It's like all the fight in her drains instantly and she starts crying against his chest as he mumbles words of comfort in her ear.

Right next to them Joyce is being hugged by her son and Hopper's gone to pick up Eleven and check her over himself.

"You okay, kid?"

"Yeah, dad. It's just been a crazy couple of days."

Nathan pulls back and smiles down at his daughter. "Tell me about it."

The group quickly gathers together in a loose circle, everyone explaining what's been going on and what they've found out. It turns out the adults knew about the Russians and their town Mayor was a total traitor. They speak of a gate in some underground lair and the keys they need to off some energy beam that's keeping the gate open.

Dustin, Steve, Erica, and Robin then mention they've been in said underground lair and they quickly create a map for the adults to explain it much more easier. Erica, and the man they've come know as Murray, get into a brief heated argument that has Dani snorting and her dad chuckling quietly.

The adults make it their mission to head into the Russian base, but Dustin is hearing none of it. It's mentioned that they've been trapped down there for the entire day so they know it better than anyone else, but the adults argue that this is their fight and the kids need to be kept safe. Erica then, not so kindly, informs them they'll need walkie talkies to keep in contact so the kids can direct the adults where to go. Robin mentions that it won't work because radio signals are cut off down there- that they'll need a really strong radio tower- and Dustin lights up. He knows of a tower that will work perfectly, they just need to get there to be able to coordinate communications to guide the adults through the bunker.

"Well then lets go. I'm driving," Steve says. Hopper tosses him a set of keys and Steve, Dustin, Robin, and Erica all leave together.

Hopper, Murray, and Nathan make plans to head underground, and Joyce bullies her way onto the team. With nothing to do but wait until Dustin radios in, the group splinters off. Joyce is reassuring Will that everything is going to be fine, Murray is speaking with Jonathan and Nancy to make sure the children don't touch anything in his hideout they're going to, and Dani and Eleven join Jim and Nathan- the two fathers sitting their girls in between them. Billy isn't far off, he giving Dani a moment with her dad.

"I really wish you guys would let me go. I can't fight like El, but I can get you out of hairy situations should one pop up."

Nathan wraps an arm around his daughter. "Sorry, kid. No can do."

"My battery's low, but it will recharge," Eleven quietly muses.

"I know it will, kid. I know," Hopper assures her.

"I can fight."

"Better than any of us, but right now I need you safe," he tells her. "I need you both safe," he then amends while staring at Dani.

"This thing is after you," Nathan says. "It's not after us. Do you understand?"

Eleven doesn't say anything, so Hopper reaches in and moves her hair behind her ear. "Hey, I need you to understand." She finally nods, albeit reluctantly.

"Hey," Mike interrupts. "We should probably go."

Hopper sighs and Eleven turns to hug him. Smiling sadly, Dani turns to hug her father as well.

"Be safe," Nathan murmurs.

"I'll do my best."

As the daughters release their fathers, Dani and Eleven stand and clasp hands. Hopper watches on, faintly smiling. "You don't know just how relieved I am to know that El has got you in her corner," he tells Dani. "Thank you for watching out for her."

"I would say it was no problem, but this pain in the ass attracts trouble left and right."

Hopper huffs a laugh and then the girls are turning to face their friends. Mike is immediately on Eleven's other side as Dani moves her arm underneath one of El's, the two of them helping her walk.

"Mike," Hopper then calls out. The boy in questions whirls around. "Be careful."

Mike nods and starts walking, and Dani grins over at him. "In case you didn't know, that was Papa Hopper giving you his blessing to corrupt his daughter."

"Ew! Don't be gross," he hisses.

Everyone chuckles as they head for the front doors, the adults quickly making their own departure. It's a slow journey outside and to Nancy's car, but they get there in one piece.

Max is the one to notice that Eleven's bleeding from her nose without even using her powers, but she reassures them she's fine. Then after helping her into the car, Dani jogs to the other side where Billy's at glancing around the parking lot.

"What? What's wrong?"

"Where the fuck is your car?" He asks. "I parked it right here."

Nancy attempts to start her own car, but the engine only turns over and over. Billy glances at the station wagon with a frown, he then hollering for her to pop the hood. Dani is still wondering where the hell her car is, anger slowly building that some dipshit took it, when Billy curses.

"The ignition cable is gone."

"What?" Jonathan mutters. "No way."

"Take a look, dumb ass. It's gone!" Billy snaps at him.

An engine suddenly revs and everyone startles, headlights off in the distance clicking on.

"Motherfucker," Dani seethes. It's her car and whoever's in it is revving the engine as an intimidation tactic. "I'm gonna murder whoever the hell that is." She's glaring at the faint silhouette she can see, hands fisted at her sides. Her anger doubles and her head starts to ache, and she's only brought out of her inner rambling when

there's a shove to her shoulder.

"Knock that shit off now," Billy tells her angrily. "We need to come up with another plan."

Blinking her head clear, she frowns at him. "What shit? I wasn't doing anything."

"Dani," Jonathan says. "The, uh, the shadows were swirling around you. It started around your ankles and then traveled upward. It was like you were in a trance."

"And you're bleeding again, dumb ass."

The Firebird's engine revs once more and Nancy quickly slaps her hands against the back passenger window. "Lets go! Back in the mall. Go, go, go."

Lucas, Max, and Will scurry out of the back door while Jonathan quickly helps Mike get Eleven out from the very back. Billy has to drag Dani away, she still worked up and extremely pissed off over her stolen car.

Back in the mall, the adults are long gone and the kids rush far back away from the doors as possible. Eleven is situated on the floor before Mike's pulling out his walkie.

"Scoops Troop, do you copy?" He asks over and over. There's no reply and Dani sighs as the younger boy starts pacing. "Scoops Troop, I repeat, do you copy? We're trapped in the mall in need of emergency transportation."

As Mike goes on and on, informing Scoops Troop- Dustin, Steve, Robin, and Erica- that Heather's found them, Nancy goes about stripping one of the Russian's of his handgun. Billy shrugs, he doing the same to another and tucking it in the back of his jeans.

"You're gonna kill her, aren't you?" Dani asks.

Nancy shrugs. "It's only a precaution."

"It's not just against Heather," Will says. "If she knows we're here, so

does the Mindflyer."

Not knowing exactly how to feel, Dani goes back to watching Mike pace. As he passes the car Eleven had flung earlier, an idea comes to her. "There's no chance that will drive, right?"

She meant it as a joke, but as the others look over at the overturned car, Jonathan perks up. "We don't need it to drive. We just need the ignition cable."

"Finally a good idea!" Billy rushes over to the car with the kids hot on his trail.

Billy and Jonathan situate themselves on either end of the car, Dani, Nancy, Lucas, Mike, and Max situating themselves in the middle. On three they push with all their might, but the car only budes so much. It's a strain to keep it up only a few seconds, and the car falls back down.

"Goddammit!" Billy barks. "Lets go again."

Eleven climbs to her feet and limps forward. "Wait. Let me try." Mike sighs, but she nods over at him. "I can do it."

Glancing around, everyone shrugs and then climbs out from behind the car to stand behind Eleven. With one arm raised and held out, Eleven concentrates on moving the car with just her mind. The metal of it creaks and groans, but it doesn't move. Even as she screams, she collapses. Something's wrong with her powers.

"El?" Dani walks up to her and kneels. "It's okay. We'll figure something else out."

Eleven quietly cries as Dani kneels next to her to offer some silent support, and then Mike's reappearing with thick metal rods. One by one they situate the rods beneath the car and Mike tells them that adding weight on the rods will lift the car.

As Dani watches with a grin, they manage to get the car on it's side. Then with one final push from everyone, the car is back on it's own four wheels.

The hood is quickly opened as Nancy and Jonathan scour for the ignition cable, but Dani's attention is elsewhere. Eleven's walked off and is now digging through the trash, she producing an empty soda can and placing it atop the trash can.

"What's she doing?" Billy wonders.

They watch as she stares intensely at the can and Dani frowns. "Something's wrong. With her powers I mean."

Moments pass as Mike and Max join them, and then they make their way towards the clearly distressed girl.

"You okay?" Mike asks her. But Eleven merely stares at him, nose bleeding and panting.

Max's eyebrows suddenly furrow, she glancing around in confusion. The glass ceiling above them suddenly rattles and it's then everyone notices the thundering footsteps approaching.

The glass rattles even more, creaking, and Mike starts panting heavily. "Nancy!"

They all look up in time to see a dark shadow loom over the glass ceiling and then the remaining group is split in two as the Mindflyer drops in.

Mike and Max have a hold on Eleven, and Billy has his hand wrapped tightly around Dani's. Mike and Max lead them to a bunch of barrels that have been pressed together, a sheet of wood sitting atop of it and giving them some coverage. They hunker down and Dani quietly curses when she hears their abandoned walkie come to life.

"Griswald family, this is Scoops Troop, do you copy?" The Mindflyer roars in agitation. *"Griswald family, this is Scoops Troop, do you copy? Do you copy?!"*

"What do we do? What do we do?!" Dani quietly panics.

"Quiet!" Billy hisses.

Since she's known him, Billy's never quite gotten after her as much as

he had today. Normally she'd be sassing him up and down for daring to speak to her in the manner he has, but then again they are fighting for their lives. So for the mean time, she'll grant him a pass.

The Mindflyer continues to roar and stomp around, seeking them out in hopes of finding Eleven.

"Can you get to the others?" Max asks. "Lucas is over there."

Dani nods. "I can try."

But just as Dani closes her eyes, Billy nudges her. "Don't even think about. You need to save your energy for emergencies, not because Max is worried about her goddamn boyfriend."

"You're such a hypocrite!" Max seethes. "If it were Dani over there, you'd be asking someone to portal her to you."

"But it's not."

Mike swats at everyone just as the Mindflyer growls from somewhere above them and the group falls silence once more, holding their breath.

The sound of the Mindflyer's footsteps get further away and Dani allows herself a chance to finally breathe properly.

Mike chances a look over their temporary shelter and then quickly ducks down. "It's turned away. If we make a run for it, I think we can make it."

"No way. Not with El's leg the way it is," Max says.

"We have to try."

"There's another way to get out," Eleven suddenly informs them. "Through the GAP."

Mike checks the location of the Mindflyer before agreeing. "Okay."

"You guys run," Billy tells them. "I'll take El."

Mike stares at him briefly before agreeing. "Okay." Another moment passes. "Now."

Billy scoops up Eleven into his arms with barely any trouble at all and he quickly follows after Dani. They've barely cleared the store's entrance when Dani trips, she knocking over some metal rods and breaking glass. She yelps.

The Mindflyer roars and Mike quickly finds them another hiding spot as it starts stomping in their direction.

Hunkering down and huddling together, Dani whimpers out an apology. Billy wraps an arm around her shoulders and the other around Max to hold them close when she lets loose her own whimper. Dani can see Max's surprised expression, but then it quickly morphs into fear as the Mindflyer's clicks and squeals can be heard entirely too close for comfort.

The Mindflyer suddenly roars again, tossing a mannequin into the wall that lands right next to Mike. The mannequin is wearing the exact same shirt as Eleven and Dani gulps in fear.

Dani slips her hand into Eleven's, dragging the girl and Mike closer to her. The seconds seem to drag and Dani starts to silently cry. She doesn't want to die- not now and definitely not like this. She wonders how her dad's doing and how he'll react to the news of her death, and her mind is swirling with such dark thoughts that she doesn't realize the tentacle from the Mindflyer is right next to Mike's face until it's snapping back to it's host as the sound of a pop resonates throughout the mall.

The Mindflyer roars and starts stomping off in another direction. Now's their chance to make a move.

"Lets go."

Mike leads them through a back door, winding through the halls of what Dani guesses are the emergency exits of the mall. They can hear the Mindflyer roaring in the distance, relief flooding them as they finally exit the mall and hear it's thundering footsteps getting further and further. Just as they round the side of the mall, however, they're

treated to the sight of Dani's wrecked and smoking car.

"Son of a bitch," she growls.

The driver's side door opens and Heather falls out, she groggily getting up and then meeting their gazes with a sneer.

"Shit, shit, shit," Max chants.

"Back inside," Billy urges.

They rush back the way they'd come, winding through the halls once more. Dani and Max keep looking over their shoulder, hearts pounding just as Mike finds an elevator. But the elevator is taking entirely too long and a door banging open just down the hall has Billy lowering Eleven and leaving Max in charge of her.

Rounding the corner with Billy, he and Dani come face to face with a dirt-smeared Heather who has a million black veins appearing all over her body.

"Heather," he calmly calls out. She shows no signs of recognition. "Come on, sweetheart, you don't wanna do this." She keeps stomping in their direction, eyes blazing with anger. Billy pulls out the gun from the waistband of his jeans and takes aim. "Heather. Your name is Heather. You work at Hawkins pool with me and the other shit for brains we call friends," he grits out now.

"Heather, please," Dani pleads. "Snap out of-"

Her head painfully snaps to the side, she hitting the wall and sliding down with a groan. Her vision swims, but she can still hear Billy and Mike shouting, fighting back with all their might. A gunshot rings out, Billy shouts and then falls silent as Max screams for him. Eleven suddenly screams, the noise of her fighting making Dani whimper and try to sit up to help. She sees Heather easily pluck up an unconscious Eleven and drape her over her shoulder, and the last thing Dani sees is the bottom of Heather's shoe as her foot collides with her face.

9. When It's All Over

Author's Note: Umm.. I'm sorry?

When It's All Over

*Calling to the afterlife
Can you hear us when we cry?
Call out to the after life
Can you show us how to fight?
It's all gone wrong
Heaven hold us
We've lost the sun
Heaven told us
The world was strong
Heaven hold us
Where do we go
When it's all over?*

A sting to her left cheek is what wakes Dani, her head lolling to the side as pain explodes all over her face. She groans and whimpers and attempts to curl up on her side, but a hand shoves her shoulder back down.

"Dani? Dani, wake up! The kid's gone."

She squints and waits for her vision to clear, she then blinking up at Billy. "Wha-?"

"Get the fuck up, Lewis. El is gone!"

"Did you- did you just slap me?" She slurs.

"Not the time." Billy quickly stands and pulls Dani to her own two feet, she leaning against the wall as Billy limps over to shake awake Mike and Max. Dani inhales and exhales deeply, centering herself before Billy comes back over to check her over once again. "What happened? What happened to your leg?"

"Heather kicked our asses and shot me. You good to go?"

She frowns. "Yeah. Yeah, I think so."

"El? El?!" Mike shouts. He turns in a circle, eyes a bit crazed. "Where is she?!"

Billy bristles at the kid's tone. "How the hell am I supposed to know? I got knocked out just like you."

Max reaches out a hand to lay on Mike's shoulder, she shaking her head at him. She, better than anyone, knows that now is not the time to rile up Billy. An explosion sounds and everyone's head whips towards the same direction. The Mindflayer roars and suddenly they're running towards it.

Billy bursts out first, panting heavily and putting most of his weight on his one good leg. Dani is right behind him, Mike behind her, and Max bringing up the rear. The two younger kids skid to a stop, bumping into Dani and Billy as they stare up in sheer terror at the Mindflayer being pelted by fireworks.

"I need to find El," Mike mutters. And before Dani can stop him, he and Max are running off together.

"That that little shit is going to get herself killed," Billy hisses.

Dani can see Steve and Robin up on the second floor, and knows the others are up there as well given the fireworks coming from various directions. She glances around frantically, her mind only on one individual. And when she spots her- Heather hovering over Eleven- her heart practically falls into her stomach. Heather's got a hold on Eleven's shoulders, she slamming the younger girl over and over on the ground as the younger screams and kicks out in an attempt to free herself.

"No." Dani stares in horror as Heather does her best to keep Eleven down in preparation for whatever the Mindflayer has planned for her. She's not even concentrating, not really, and all she can think of is how urgent she's needed by her sister's side. From one moment to the next, Dani can feel *something* mounting within and then it just.. it clicks into place. "**No!**" She screams this time. And from one blink to the next, Dani appears just mere feet from Eleven and Heather in a

whirl of black shadows. She sees nothing but red, her anger fully consuming her. **"Get off my sister!"**

Without thinking, Dani reels back with her right arm before flinging it forward as if she were skipping a stone across water. Shadows rise up, black crystal-like shards forming from within the shadows and flinging themselves at Heather. With shards sticking out from one side of her body, Heather glares at Dani and screeches. Black veins practically pulse all over the possessed girl's body and Dani wastes no time in reeling her other arm back and then flinging it forward again. This time, Heather is forcefully shoved a good twenty feet from Eleven and is impaled on a steel rod from some fallen debris from the ceiling.

With the smallest threat taken care of, Dani blinks and she can suddenly see clear again. Her whole body feels heavy and she collapses with a groan, and Eleven slowly crawls over to her as she cries. "D-Dani?"

"Yeah?" The two girls grab onto one another, hugging as they collapse together back on the ground. "It's okay. It's going to be okay."

Someone suddenly slides up on their knees next to them, Billy crashing into the girls before quickly righting himself. "What the hell was that, Lewis? I thought you could only open shadow portals."

"M'not sure. I never really explored exactly what it was I could do."

"That was one hell of a way to find out." Part of the ceiling comes crashing down and Billy shields the girls from most of the debris. Pushing his hair out of his face, he says, "We need to move. Now."

"Okay."

Dani and Eleven help one another up, and Billy guides them around the Mindflayer as it's roaring and attempting to strike out at those bothering it. But just before they can get to safety, the fireworks suddenly stop. The kids are yelling up on the second floor, but the Mindflayer has a goal in mind- that goal being to go after Eleven.

"Run!" Dani screams.

Billy takes off just ahead of them, clearing somewhat of a path for them to follow. The Mindflyer is immensely pissed off, it's legs stomping and tentacles snapping out with the intent to kill.

Dani trips over a mangled chair from the food court and Eleven goes down with her. Hard. The girls ignore their pain and are trying to scramble back up to their feet as fast as they can, with the others screaming insults to get them moving faster, when the Mindflyer takes advantage of their sudden misfortune. Positioning itself near the girls, the creature roars and Dani's heart sinks. They're too slow. So wanting to take the brunt of the attack, Dani wraps herself around Eleven and turns them so her back's to the creature just as a tentacle snaps out from it's mouth.

But the tentacle never touches her. Instead Billy starts screaming in pain and Max is screaming for Billy.

"Go! Get out of here!"

Dani glances over her shoulder and her eyes tear up. "No. No, no, no." She and Eleven scramble up to their feet, they stumbling to the side as Billy fends off the Mindflyer single handedly. Both his hands, up to their wrists, are engulfed in the mouth of the tentacle that was meant to harm Dani and Eleven.

"Go!" Billy shouts again, struggling. Dani sobs as Eleven tries to drag her away, a scream being ripped from her throat as another tentacle attaches itself to his ribs.

"El, I can't- I can't leave him," she cries. Dani glances between Eleven and Billy, her brain telling her one thing while her heart says another. Eleven must see something in her expression because she eventually nods, she letting Dani go and stumbling back into Mike's arms as he suddenly makes an appearance.

Billy screams once more and Dani's mind immediately shifts into focus. Her hands are fisted at her sides as she starts limping back towards the chaos, her hands then opening and fingers tensed in a claw-like gesture. The shadows seem to follow her along the floor,

black wisps drawing themselves in towards Dani. Side by side with Billy then, Dani lets out a piercing scream as she thrust both her arms outward. Black shards fly from the shadows, penetrating the flesh of the Mindflayer and sending it stumbling back with a screech as it lets go of Billy.

Max is immediately at Billy's side, she and Steve doing their best to help drag him away.

Dani screams again, more larger shards appearing from the shadows and hitting the creature.

"Holy shit," Dustin muses. "Did anyone know she could do this?"

"Come on. We need to get out of here," Jonathan says, urging the group into motion.

"Not without Dani," Eleven frowns.

Huddled together, the group watches as Dani continues to scream. Every scream is accompanied with a volley of shadow shards, the Mindflayer screeching and squealing in pain. Wind suddenly comes out of nowhere and the group are struck speechless when Dani's feet lift off the ground. The shadows are carrying her.

"Dani!"

Dani's head whips in their direction, her eyes pitch black. "**Leave.**" Even her voice is different. And with a wave of her hand in their direction, an inky portal opens up right next to the group. "**Go.**" Her expression crumples then and her eyes clear. "Just go."

Eyes blazing, Billy limps forward. "No. Not without you!"

She smiles faintly at him, but before Dani can return her attention to the threat at hand, a tentacle is latching itself directly in the center of her chest. Dani gasps, eyes wide, and the winds immediately stop. The Mindflayer screeches victoriously before slamming her into the ground and the shadows start to retreat in mourning.

"**No!**"

The portal is the last thing Dani has a semblance of control over and she glances at her friends once more. "Go," she pleads, tears leaking from the corner of her eyes. "Hurry." The portal flickers, and Jonathan and Nancy are quick to drag Mike and Will through it even as they shout their refusal.

The teeth attached to Dani pull and she arches in pain. Billy, Max, and Eleven are screaming at her to fight back, but Dani's accepted that this is her time. So long as she can get her friends and family to safety, she's done enough. So with the last of her strength, she forces a smile for them.

"Dani." Billy's voice is broken as his bottom lip trembles, eyes glazed with unshed tears and anger. "Please, I-"

"I'm sorry." And with a flick of her arm, she sends the last of her friends through the portal towards safety.. and lets the portal close. The Mindflayer roars as if it knows what she just did and it presses down on her chest. Dani coughs, blood splattering her chin and neck, and heart aching. "Come on, you asshole. Do you worst."

Arms spread out at her sides, Dani closes her eyes. She rather not watch the killing blow. But before that blow could even land, the Mindflayer screeches and the tentacle unlatches from her chest. Eyes flying open, Dani watches in shock as the Mindflayer practically vibrates in agony before collapsing silent. It's.. it's dead.

Laughing hollowly, Dani rolls over onto her stomach and pushes herself up onto hands and knees. Crawling away, she cries in both relief and terror. The events, the agony she's in.. it's all crashing down on her and all she wants is her dad.

The ground beneath her suddenly rumbles and Dani's heart thuds. "No. Not yet," she whimpers. She can hear an explosion from down below and barely has enough strength to stand up and throw herself behind the counter in a shoe store before everything around her explodes in noise and heat.

- X -

"Dani! DANI!" The explosion startles the group of kids waiting at the

furthermost edge of the parking lot into silence and then Billy's attempting to make a mad dash back towards the mall. "No, no, no," he murmurs frantically.

It's a struggle to keep him from rushing back into the mall, and it takes both Steve and Jonathan to keep him back. Even injured, Billy manages to get a few hits in on the other two boys.

"Goddammit, Hargrove! Quit it!" Steve snarls, shoving the boy back. "It's done. She's gone, man. I'm-"

"Don't say that!" Billy explodes. "She's not gone! She's-"

"Billy," Max's soft cries garner his attention. When Billy glances at her, the tears stream down his step-sister's face as she shakes her head. "Stop. Please."

"I'm sorry," Steve says, the fight draining out of him as Billy momentarily ceases his actions. "But come on, man. The building exploded. She's-"

"No. No, she can't be-"

The noise of rumbling engines resonate throughout the night and helicopters zoom by overhead. The kids and older teenagers all huddle together as ambulance sirens pierce the air and police lights light up the dim parking lot.

Military men jump out the back of the trucks, they all rushing towards the flaming mall. EMT's immediately start pulling the kids aside and towards the back of the ambulances, and question after question are fired at them as they're being patched up.

"Look!" Max exclaims, pointing off in the distance. "They made it."

Joyce Byers is stumbling in the middle of the parking lot, glancing around with all chaos going on around her. Will and Jonathan immediately make a beeline for their mom, and she embraces them with a sob. Nathan and Murray are next, but Nathan is being supported by his new friend. The clearly beaten man is led to an ambulance of his own, and Max and Billy stumble over to him.

"Where s'my daughter?" Nathan slurs. He's got a gash above his right eye, a busted lip, and a gnarly bruise forming around his neck. "Where s'my baby?"

"N-Nathan?" Billy calls out. The EMT tries to shoo the kids, but Nathan stops him from doing so.

"Billy? Where's Dani? Is she okay?"

Max hangs her head and Billy's hand lands on the back of her neck, squeezing periodically- not to hurt her, but to ground both him and her with the news he's about to deliver. "I-" His voice cracks and his blue eyes swim with tears once more.

"No," Nathan whines, expression crumpling as he shoves the helping hands away. "No, not my baby."

"I'm so sorry, Mr. Lewis."

"No, no, no," he sobs. "Not my baby. Please, not her."

Max hides her face in both her hands as she cries and without thinking Billy turns her around so she can hide in his side. Her arms wrap low around his waist and he averts his gaze as more EMT's rush to the ambulance to sedate the now grieving father. But as Billy glances anywhere but at Nathan, his gaze ends up landing on Eleven. The girl is standing on her own, expression contorted into pure grief as she sobs out her own sadness. There's no Chief of Police being bandaged up anywhere and Billy has an uncomfortable knot in his stomach.

It appears as if someone else didn't make it out.

"Hey, shithead," he rasps, nudging Max. "El needs you."

Searching for Eleven, Max soon spots her friend wrapped up in her own grief and rushes to embrace the girl. Mike joins them right after, the other kids following as they all envelop Eleven in a massive group hug.

Steve and Robin are the first to sneak off, the two having to make sure Dustin and Erica were okay. Lucas goes with them since he

needs to get his sister back home as soon as possible, and then Mr. and Mrs. Wheeler are pulling up and gathering their two children to take home after having been alerted to their children's whereabouts. Neil and Susan Hargrove show up too, but they only take Max with them since Billy refuses to leave Nathan's side. It becomes uncomfortable for everyone involved when Neil quietly threatens his son to get his ass in their car, but an EMT steps in and mentions that Billy is one that's going to need a trip to the hospital. Neil had sneered, but ended up leaving after telling Billy to find his own way home then.

One military man in particular starts talking to Nathan after asking about Jim Hopper's whereabouts, and Billy listens as Nathan tells the man all he knows. It's a somber affair given Nathan is half out of it from the sedatives, and Billy takes it upon himself to fill in what happened inside the mall with Dani and the other kids. The man promises to look for both Jim and Dani before taking his leave, and Billy pulls himself inside the back of the ambulance. So long as Dani is still out there, Nathan refuses to leave without knowing what happened to her.

And since the injuries they're all sporting is nothing really major, everyone else opts to stay behind as well.

As the rain starts to come down in a steady drizzle, Billy climbs into the back of the ambulance with Nathan. Eleven pops up, eyes puffy and red. Billy scoots over and she climbs in, her bottom lip trembling as she and Nathan meet gazes.

"Mr. Lewis?" Her voice is absolutely wrecked. After Billy has seen what this girl is capable of, he's surprised to see her so meek. "I know now's not the time, but.. what's going to happen to me?"

Nathan struggles to sit up, so Billy helps him. Then once up, he reaches out for Eleven's hand to grasp within his own. "Jim had a plan should the worst happen," he tiredly tells her. "There are custodial papers already signed in his desk and I have the copies in my office. He wanted you placed somewhere you didn't have to hide who you were and Dani-" his voice cracks and Eleven squeezes his hand tighter as she sees Nathan's expression fall. "He, uh, he knew how you looked up to Dani so he wanted you with us. You'll be

staying with me, kid."

Eleven sheds a few more tears before sitting back against the wall of the ambulance. Nathan reclines once more and Eleven glances at Billy. He's tense and she can practically feel the grief wafting off him. She knows he's not the nicest person, but she also knows enough to know that everyone needs some form of comfort when going through such a tragic affair.

Hesitantly reaching over, Eleven's hand lands on Billy's left fist sitting atop his thigh. He jerks under her touch and she startles, but then she slowly reaches for him again. He glares at her, but she doesn't let his anger deter her and cautiously flattens his hand to hold between both of her own. Shakily exhaling, Billy calms himself and Eleven tucks herself closer to him.

Hours later, as the sun is finally coming up, the military man returns and Nathan sits up with a pained grunt. Billy sits up straighter and nudges Eleven awake who still has a hold on his hand.

"Did you find anything?"

The man shakes his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Lewis. There's no sign of Jim or your daughter Dani."

Numb, Nathan falls back into his bed as the military man offers his condolences before taking his leave once more.

"This is such bullshit," Billy seethes. "How can they not find her?"

"If she's not there," Eleven weakly mumbles, "then where is she?"

Nathan is lost to his grief as Eleven and Billy share a baffled look. Where indeed.

10. Lean On Me

Lean On Me

*Sometimes in our lives
We all have pain
We all have sorrow.
But if we are wise
We know that there's
Always tomorrow.
Lean on me
When you're not strong
I'll be your friend
I'll help you carry on.*

After a morning of grieving and memorizing statements given by the military, and then feeding them to the local police and newspaper as they snapped pictures of the still smoldering mall, Nathan made sure Billy and Eleven didn't actually need a trip to the hospital. Billy had more wounds thanks to the Mindflayer, but the EMT's easily cleaned him up, bandaged him properly, and even gave him some antibiotics to fight off and prevent any infection. Fortunately for him, the gunshot wound was only a graze and didn't need more attention than necessary.

One of Nathan's co-workers offered to give Nathan a ride home, and he made sure to keep Eleven and Billy close. Everyone then got dropped off at Nathan's house and Billy took his sweet time leaving.

He lingers by his car where Dani's own car should have been and he only moves when Nathan claps the teen on the back. "Listen to me. If your father gives you hell, you get your ass back here. Call the house any time, day or night. My door is always open." Billy's hand clench at his side before he reaches for his door handle, but pauses when Nathan then squeezes his shoulder. "I'm serious, Billy. My door is always open."

A moment passes and then Billy shakily exhales. "Yes, sir." Looking over his shoulder, he says, "I'm sorry again. Dani-"

"*Is alive*," Nathan tells him, wisely choosing to not mention Billy's watering eyes. "A father knows these things. We'll find her. We have to."

"We will." They both glance down to see Eleven standing there, she hugging herself tightly as a sad smile makes itself known on her young face. "My batteries need to recharge, but I can find her when they do."

Billy tersely nods before throwing himself into the driver's seat, rolling down the window. "I wanna be here when you try. My number's up on the fridge."

"Yeah. I'll call. Be careful, son."

PAGE BREAK

Two days pass and Eleven is all moved in to Mr. Lewis' house. She didn't have much to begin with, but what she did have was hers. She even snagged several of Hopper's plaid shirts to take with her and settled in quite nicely in the third biggest room of the Lewis home.

To this day she's still struggling with her powers. The most Eleven's been capable of is briefly shaking a can of Coke with her mind, but even doing that puts a strain on her and she's anxious to hurry and heal. Mr. Lewis keeps telling her to be patient, but she can see in his eyes how desperate he is to start the search for Dani. Everyone refuses to believe she's gone for good.

The town ends up hosting a funeral for Jim even though there's no body. They bury a black casket and flowers beneath a headstone with his name on it, and it's on this particular day that the town comes to find out that Jim had another daughter. Everyone was shocked, but Nathan spun that story that Jane/El's mother had kept her a secret after she was born because Jim had moved on with his new wife. Although when Jane's mother became severely ill, Jane's aunt sought out Jim and told him about his daughter. He recently got full custody which is why no one really knew about her yet, and the town folk could only watch with sad eyes as Jane Hopper was escorted by Nathan Lewis as they said their final goodbyes to Jim.

PAGE BREAK

Joyce Byers deciding to move her family out of Hawkins was a blow to mostly everyone. The kids didn't know how to let go of Will, and Jonathan didn't want to leave Nancy. But there was nothing left in Hawkins for the family and Joyce was tired of her boys being in danger. She had tried to stall as long as she could since the boys were keen on not leaving Nathan while Dani was still out there, but as the days passed Joyce began losing hope.

"It's okay," Nathan tells her the night she decides that it's time to relocate. "I understand. *Dani* would understand."

"Thank you." Sipping her Scotch, Joyce grimaces before saying, "I, uh, I want to finish getting Hopper's cabin in order before I start on my house. Do you think you can help or..?"

"Shit. I'm really sorry, Joyce, but the station really needs my help after.."

"It's okay." She shakily exhales, chuckling softly as she takes yet another sip. The silence stretches between them until she breaks it once more. "How's El handling everything?"

Nathan sighs. "She's.. coping. It helps she has all her friends coming and going to keep her busy."

"Have her powers come back?"

"She's getting there. She's quite anxious for her batteries to fully recharge."

Joyce smiles sadly. "I would be too if I relied on my powers as much as she did."

He huffs and sips his own drink. "Yeah. No kidding."

Tears unwillingly spring to Nathan's eyes and he wipes them away with a snuffle. Joyce immediately reaches out to grab his knee. "Hey, it's going to be okay. When Will went missing, everyone kept telling me he was dead. But I knew better. A parent knows when his or her child is gone."

"Yeah. I know. It's just- God I really want her batteries to recharge faster, but El's just a kid. I can't- no, I *won't* pressure her. I won't ruin what's left of her childhood by pushing her to locate my child in her weakened state."

"It'll all work out in the end, Nathan. You just have to have faith."

PAGE BREAK

When Eleven found out Joyce was going to finish cleaning out the cabin, she volunteered to help. There was still some stuff of hers left over that she didn't know what to do with, but now that Joyce was going to be there Eleven figured this was as good time as any to finish cleaning out her old room.

Joyce is in Hopper's room, boxing up his clothes that she had threw into a pile on the floor. She's haphazardly folding his uniform shirts when one in particular catches her attention, she digging into the front pocket and pulling out a piece of paper with a frown. When she opens up the folded piece of paper, she smiles sadly. It's the big heart-to-heart speech she and Hop had planned for Eleven and Mike when he was getting aggravated with how much time the two kids spent alone together.

"Donation box?"

Joyce turns around to find Eleven holding a teddy bear that's seen better days. "Uh, yeah, sure." She clears her throat, folding the paper back up in her lap.

Eleven sees it and gestures towards it. "What.. is that?"

"Uh.. it's- it's the speech Hop wrote for you and Mike," she answers with a smile.

"Speech?"

Joyce's eyebrows furrow. "Yeah. You know, the heart-to-heart?" Eleven looks as confused as ever and Joyce shakes her head. "He never talked to you, did he?"

Joyce then scoffs as Eleven shakes her head. "Can I read?"

Taking a stand, Joyce Byers hands over the paper to Eleven. "I'll just be out front."

Eleven waits until she's alone before settling on the floor, she laying on her stomach as she opens the paper up.

"There's something I've been wanting to talk to you both about. I know this is a difficult conversation, but I care about you both very much. And I know that you care about each other very much, and that's why it's important that we set these boundaries moving forward so we can build an environment where we all feel comfortable, trusted, and open to sharing our feelings."

Eleven frowns at all the crossed out words and sentences, and runs her fingers over a few stains. Was that mustard?

"The truth is.. for so long I'd forgotten what those even were. I've been stuck in one place, in a cave, you might say. A deep, dark cave. And then, I left some Eggos out in the woods, and you came into my life.. and for the first time in a long time I started to feel things again. I started to feel happy. But lately, I guess I've been feeling distant from you. Like you're.. you're pulling away from me or something."

Tears fill Eleven's eyes and she lets them fall as she reads on.

"I miss playing board games every night, making triple decker eggo extravaganzas at sunrise, watching westerns together before we toss off, but I know you're getting older. Growing. Changing. And I guess, if I'm being really honest, that's what scares me. I don't want things to change. So I think that's maybe why I came in here, to try and maybe stop that change. To turn back the clock. To make things go back to how they were."

I know that's naive. It's just now how life works. It's moving. Always moving whether you like it or not. And yeah, sometimes it's painful. Sometimes it's sad. And sometimes it's surprising. Happy. So you know what? Keep on growing up, kid. Don't let me stop you. Make mistakes, learn from them. And when life hurts you, because it will, remember the hurt. The hurt is good. It means you're out of that cave. But please.. if you don't mind, for the sake of your poor 'ol dad, keep the door open three inches."

Eleven laughs, wetly, she having to gulp down the lump lodged in her throat. She misses him so much and to read this.. to have this last piece of Hopper.. it's everything to her. Her chuckling tears soon turn into grieving sobs, but they're quick to taper off when there's a knock on the opened door.

Wiping her tears, Eleven glances up at Joyce standing in the doorway. "You okay?"

"Yeah." She snuffles. "Time to go?"

"Yeah, sweetheart. It's time to go."

PAGE BREAK

It's been nearly four days and still no sign of Dani.

Everyone had been waiting for Eleven's batteries to recharge, but without telling anyone Eleven chose to search for Hopper in the Void before even looking for Dani on the previous day. No one knew she was going to attempt it, but she did, and what she found had her uncontrollably sobbing and Nathan holding her for the rest of the night.

She found nothing.

Jim Hopper no longer existed.

It felt horrible to know that Jim was actually dead, but it was also a relief to have that closure.

Now they had to wait even longer until Eleven felt up to it to search for Dani and Billy was pissed. He was so pissed that he forgot who he was talking to and mouthed off back to his dad one night, and Neil Hargrove took pleasure in teaching his son some respect by beating him.

So sporting a few new bruises and a cut near his hairline from where he'd fallen and hit the corner of his bedside table, Billy speeds down a dark road with his music blaring angrily.

He's bleeding, sweating, and has sticky tear tracks down his face as

he grips the steering wheel tight in hand. His emotions are all over the place, so when his headlights flicker and his engine sputters, he flies into a rage.

"Goddammit! God-*fuckin'*-dammit!" He screams, slamming his palm into the steering wheel with each word. The lights continue to flicker and he quickly pulls off to the side under a lighted pole. His engine sputters again and he quickly cuts it, popping open the hood and grabbing a flashlight from his glove box.

Shoving his door open, Billy then paces the length of his car before shoving open the hood with an annoyed grunt. Everything feels so out of control and he's.. done. He's just done. Fate's dealt him a shitty hand since he was only just a kid, and just as he's found something that actually made him feel an ounce of happiness it gets taken away.

Then again, he's not only pissed off at Fate. He's pissed off at Dani. Instead of getting herself out, she pushed everyone through the portal and left herself to die all alone.

He clicks on the flashlight just as the light on the pole goes out, followed by his headlights, and then the flashlight itself. Feeling beaten down, Billy huffs and hangs his head in resignation.

"Billy..?"

His head snaps back up, eyes squinting to adjust to the darkness. He knows that voice. "Dani?"

"..Billy."

"Dani!" He pushes away from his car, boots crunching gravel beneath his feet. "Dani!? Where are you?"

The headlights to the Camaro flick on and Billy ceases breathing all together and he stumbles to a halt. Lying in the middle of the road is Dani, still wearing the white peasant blouse and cuffed jeans. Only now she's pale and her face gaunt, and she's covered in blood. She looks directly at him and her expression crumples. "*I wanna come home.*"

"Baby, you are home." But just as Billy gathers his wits to move

towards her, his headlights cuts out once more. When they turn back on, along with the light on the pole and his flashlight, she's gone. "No. No, no, no." He rushes to where Dani was just laying and glances around in a panic. "Dani?" There's no answer. "DANI!"

Author's Note: So the Byers' have officially left the building and.. Hopper is dead. I'm sorry. I had planned on El looking for Dani, but then I realized she could have easily done the same for Jim. I didn't know how to work in Russians keeping Jim (because I refuse to believe he's actually dead in canon), so I just.. killed him off. But on the bright side, El gets to actually live with her sister.

11. Wherever You Will Go

Wherever You Will Go

*If I could, then I would
I'll go wherever you will go
Way up high or down low, I'll go wherever you will go
And maybe, I'll find out
A way to make it back someday
To watch you, to guide you through the darkest of your days
If a great wave shall fall and fall upon us all
Then I hope there's someone out there who can bring me back to you*

. .

"Okay, so tell us again what happened?"

Billy sighs and paces the living room of Nathan Lewis' house. Nathan is standing opposite him, hope blooming in his chest as Eleven watches with wide eyes.

"For the third time, I was driving down some backwoods road when the headlights on my car started flickering and my engine started acting up. I pulled over, got out, and the lights flickered again. I didn't think too much about it, but then I heard her call my name."

"Dani. You heard Dani."

"Yes." Billy grits his teeth. He knows better than to lash out at Nathan, so he takes a deep, calming breath. He's not angry at the man, he's just.. he wants Dani home as soon as possible and the more he has to go over this story, the more time they're wasting. "She appeared in the middle of the road and she told me she wanted to come home, and then she- she disappeared."

Nathan shakily exhales and glances at Eleven. "Can you.. can you try now?"

She nods. "I can try."

Eleven gets up and disappears upstairs, she coming back down with a

boombox and blindfold in hand. She puts on the radio and quickly flips it to a station that's nothing but static, and then ties the blindfold around her eyes. Taking a seat on the recliner, she leans back and relaxes her entire body.

Billy and Nathan watch on with bated breath, and the seconds quickly turn into minutes. The minutes seem to drag and just when the hope starts to dwindle.. Eleven breathes out one word that has them tensing. "Dani."

Blood starts to trickle down from her left nostril, but by now Billy knows the drill and knows not to panic.

"Found her."

Nathan chokes on a sob and Billy subconsciously reaches up to grip the back of Nathan's neck to squeeze in comfort. "Is she- is she okay?"

"..Dad?" The voice most definitely comes from the radio filled with static, and both Billy and Nathan glance at it in awe. "*M'tired, dad.*"

Falling to his knees, Nathan settles in front of the boombox. "Baby, can you hear me? Come home. Dani, come home. Please."

"Cold," Eleven says. "Too much blood."

"Home?"

"Yes, home. Come home," Nathan urges.

"Can't."

"That's bullshit!" Billy finally snaps, glaring at the boombox. "I saw you. You were here and then you were gone. Do it again, Dani. Do it one more time and come home to us."

"*M'tired. Miss you.*"

Eleven suddenly gasps and she yanks off the blindfold. Nathan sags when the connection breaks and he hides his face in the palms of his hands as he quietly cries.

Billy grimaces, but turns his attention to Eleven. "What happened?"

"Couldn't.. couldn't hold connection," she pants. "Dani's stuck."

"Stuck?"

"Yes. She's weak.. and confused?" Her brow furrows a little.

"But she's okay?" Billy asks. Eleven doesn't answer and her averted gaze answers his questions. "Shit." She snuffles and Billy pinches the bridge of his nose as his eyes close. Then gathering himself, he asks, "How bad is she?"

"Bad."

Nathan's cries get a little bit louder and Billy fists his hands at his side. "But she's alive."

It's not a question, but Eleven still answers. "Yes."

"Then she'll come back. Dani's a fighter," Billy says, mostly to himself, but loud enough for Eleven and Nathan to hear. "She'll come home. She has to."

Nathan opts to keep the news about Dani just between himself, Billy, and Eleven. He also makes Billy stay the night when he sees the newest additions of bruises to Billy's body and though Billy wants nothing more than to argue, he doesn't. Eleven is hoping to be able to reach Dani again to keep an eye on her and Billy sticks around because he wants the play by play.

A week in and everyone but the core three are losing hope of Dani ever returning. They know better, but Nathan still doesn't want to let anyone know in case the worse possible outcome comes to fruition. So while Eleven keeps an eye on Dani on the down low and Billy tries to keep somewhat busy by going back to work at the local pool, Nathan throws himself into getting Eleven ready for the public eye.

Eleven is going to need an education if she wishes to have any sort of life as an adult, so he gives her two options- she can either be home schooled or have a private tutor catch her up to speed so she can

attend public school with those her age. She's ecstatic to have the option and chooses public school with her friends. Nathan tells her that it won't be easy and she'll have to spend the rest of her summer learning without the distraction of her friends, and she readily agrees. She wants public school with Mike, Dustin, Max, and Lucas.

Later that day, after the excitement of filling in her friends on her summer plans, Eleven decides to reach out to Dani once again. Nathan and Billy are both at work, and she has just enough peace and quiet to really concentrate on where she needs to be.

Sitting on the floor of her room with the curtains closed and her radio on static, Eleven wraps a blindfold around her eyes. She inhales and exhales deeply, and soon finds herself wandering the Void.

All around is nothing but black and a few inches of water at her feet. Eleven walks around, watching as images of scenery swirl in a mist before disappearing all together. "Dani?" She calls out, voice echoing. More images swirl before a figure in the distance, curled up on the ground, comes into focus and stays. Eleven's eyes widen. "Dani!" And she takes off in a sprint.

Eleven falls to her knees by the shivering figure, her hands gently grasping Dani by the shoulder to turn her on her back.

"Wake up, Dani. Come on." She taps Dani's cheeks, lightly shaking the girl. "Wake up. Please." She snuffles.

Dani's eyes flutter open and she swallows passed the dryness of her mouth. "E-El?"

"Yes! Yes," she cries. "It's me. I'm here. Are you okay?"

"M'tired."

"I know, I know." Eleven helps Dani sit up and Dani blinks away the sleep in her eyes. "You need to come home, Dani. Now."

"M'trying."

"Try harder," Eleven pleads. "Your dad misses you. And Billy. And everyone else. Please come home."

"..I'll try."

Dani's eyes droop shut and moments later she vanishes in a swirl of mist. Eleven's eyes widen, but she quickly pulls herself out of the Void and ends up back in her room. Heaving slightly, she hopes that Dani disappearing in the Void means what she thinks it means.

With a smile, she pulls herself up and goes to wait by the phone. Dani's coming home. She just knows it.

- X -

Groaning, Dani curls in on herself tighter and squeezes her eyes shut against the blinding light. The surface beneath her is no longer flat, wet, and cold, but rather hard, bumpy, and.. hot?

Eyes then fluttering open, Dani nearly cries in relief at the sight of sun filtering in through the trees. She attempts to sit up, but everything hurts from the top of her head down to the tips of her toes. Her chest, especially, is killing her. So giving herself a couple of minutes to regulate her breathing and calm her mind, Dani rolls over amidst the protest of every muscle in her body. She continues to blink through the too bright day and pushes herself up onto her knees. Whimpering in pain, she glances down and gulps at the sight of her blood soaked clothing.

"W-Where..?"

The most Dani can comprehend is that she's somewhere in the woods. It looks both familiar and unfamiliar to her, and it isn't until she turns around that she does start to cry. She knows exactly where she's at.

Climbing to her feet, Dani cries as she limps towards the Hawkins Police Station. She'd somehow found herself behind the building, so it's a bit of a walk around to the front doors. Pushing herself faster, her hands shake and she bloodies the glass door as she practically falls inside the air conditioned building.

Dirtied, bloodied, and absolutely exhausted.. Dani then immediately collapses right there in the front lobby. Flo, the front secretary, yelps at the sight.

"Nathan! Nathan, get in here. Quick!" Since she's a little too old to get on her knees, Flo hovers nearby as she stares down at the disoriented girl. "Dani, can you hear me?"

Dani mumbles right before her eyes roll into the back of her head.

"Dani..? Dani!" Nathan rushes in, falling to knees and picking up the upper half of his daughter's torso. Tears immediately fall and he cradles her. "Somebody get an ambulance here. Now!"

- X -

Billy bursts into the hospital like the hounds of hell are on his heels, still in the community pool's standard uniform of a tank top and red shorts. He had went back to work the previous day, but since he was still on the mend they had put him to work behind the desk for the time being. But a single call from Eleven had him hurriedly clocking out with a shouted excuse about a family emergency towards his co-worker, and jumping into his Camaro before speeding away.

Eleven is waiting for him just down the hall next to the receptionist's desk, and instead of asking for a room number and being denied because he's not family, he makes a beeline for her. No words are spoken as she takes his hand in hers, he squeezing tight as he lets her lead him down various hallways to the room he so desperately needs to get to.

But before they can enter, however, he freezes with his hand on the door knob. "How is she?" He asks with a gulp.

"Alive, but she.. she lost a lot of blood." She quietly tells him.

Billy exhales shakily before entering the room and his gaze immediately drawn to the person laid up in bed. It's Dani alright, but she's extremely pale and it seems she has bruises around her eyes. There's an oxygen mask covering her nose and mouth, various wires disappearing underneath the standard issued hospital gown, and an IV taped down into the back of her right hand and another in the crook of her arm.

"She's going to be okay." The rough voice startles Billy and he quickly

blinks back the tears that had blurred his vision. Sniffling, he quickly wipes a hand down his face to rid himself of any traces. Sitting next to Dani's bed and grasping her left hand between his own is Nathan who looks as if he's been put through the ringer. "She's exhausted and lost a lot of blood and even has a few fractured ribs, but other than that she's fine."

Billy nods as his expression briefly wavers. "Where did she pop up?"

"Behind the police station, I think. She stumbled into the front lobby and collapsed. Gave poor Florence the scare of her life with the way she looked." Pain ripples across his expression and Nathan shakily breathes in and out. "Take a seat. We have a long day ahead of us until she wakes up. If she wakes up today at all."

He hesitates briefly before Eleven nudges him forward, she finally letting go of his hand that he hadn't realized he'd been gripping onto for dear life. "I'm going to make a few calls," she quietly informs Nathan. "Let everyone know Dani's home."

Nathan nods. "Please let them know to not rush down here. Tell them to give us today. They can visit tomorrow."

"Okay."

As Eleven leaves, Billy stumbles forward and plops in the only other vacant seat. He scoots as close as he can to Dani's bed and reaches for her hand, but he stops himself before touching her and places his hands back in his lap. "So what's the story?" He asks, leaning back in his seat but never letting his gaze stray from Dani herself.

"The official story is that she was in the wrong place, wrong time," Nathan says. "Since it is known that Russian's were secretly working right under our noses at the mall, we're going with the story that Dani saw something she wasn't supposed and was taken because of it."

"And how are we explaining her reappearance?"

"She escaped her captors and got lost in the woods until she found herself behind the police station."

Billy nods. "And the real story?"

"I.. have no idea," he sighs. "She passed out almost as soon as she entered the station. We'll have to ask her when she wakes up."

Nathan and Billy fall quiet then, the two of them not being able to look away from Dani's fragile looking form. Every now and then she'll twitch in her sleep, but she never wakes up. And seeing her laid out and looking so vulnerable, it makes something in Billy ache. He likes this girl- really, really likes her- and he knows for a fact that she likes him back. He's never been invested in someone quite like he's been with Dani ever since she teased him with that damn bikini of hers, and he doesn't know how to feel about the feeling panic trying to claw it's way out of his chest.

A hand clamping down on his shoulder startles him from his thoughts and he glances up at Nathan. "Stay with her, will 'ya? I need go make a few calls of my own to take some time off of work."

"Yeah."

Nathan leaves and soon it's just Billy and Dani. He moves to take Nathan's seat and after a few long seconds he finally reaches for her hand. The moment her cold hand is grasped within his own warm one.. his bottom lip trembles and tears immediately spring up. His expression crumples as he attempts to keep the tears at bay, but he still feels a few slide free when he bows his head.

Sniffling loudly and shaking his head clear, Billy then resettles his gaze on Dani and he can feel slight anger simmering just below the surface. "When you wake up and get better I'm gonna kick your ass, Lewis." The machines continue to quietly beep around him and his jaw clenches. "I want to know what the hell you were thinking when you sent us all away and stayed behind with that thing."

Dani continues to sleep and his shoulders droop, the annoyance and anger fleeing him.

Lowering his voice and fighting off the wobble he can feel threatening to come loose in his voice, he says, "Please get better. I won't kick your ass. I promise. I just want you to wake up."

The machines to continue to beep, but Dani never wakes.

It takes two days.

Two days of feeding his dad excuses, two days of avoiding work and promising to pick up double shifts after Dani wakes up, and two days of glaring at every individual who keeps walking into Dani's room to visit the unconscious girl and interfering with his time to sit next to her bed.

The last visitor of the evening has just left when Nathan claims he needs to go home for a shower, and Billy settles in until Nathan gets back. He's got one of Max's comic books in hand, idly flipping through the pages when he hears a sigh.

Freezing and then glancing up, Billy watches with bated breath as Dani's eyelids flutter.

"D-Dani?" Her eyelids fly open before she closes them again, quietly groaning and slowly reaching up to shield her eyes. Billy is up and out of his chair in a heartbeat, he leaning over. "Dani."

"Shhh.."

Her admonishment startles a chuckle out of him, his lips stretching wide in a smile then. "Don't shush me, Lewis. You've scared at least ten years off my life and that of your dad's."

"D-Dad?" She opens her eyes once more, keeping them squinted against the too bright light of the room.

"He went home to shower. He'll be back soon." Dani frowns and then reaches up to pull the oxygen mask off her face. "Can I have.. water?"

"Yeah." Billy scrambles to pour her a cup, he then plopping a straw in it before moving back to the side of her bed. Dani shifts and then whimpers in pain, and he grimaces. "Fractured ribs," he tells her. "You have several, so take it easy."

Dani whimpers some more until she falls back flat on her bed and Billy grins as he angles the straw downward to her mouth. She takes

a few draws of the cold liquid before waving him off. "Real?" She then asks.

It takes him a moment to realize what she's asking, and he quickly nods. "Real. I'm real and this place is real. You came back. You made it home, Dani."

Her expression crumples then and tears leak from the corners of her eyes. The machines connected to her start beeping a little more wildly and it isn't long until a nurse rushes in to see what the problem is. Upon seeing Dani awake, a doctor is called and Billy is instructed to wait outside while they run some tests.

He's still pacing outside Dani's room when Nathan returns and almost immediately Nathan thinks the worst. When Billy realizes it, he's quick to block Nathan's entrance with a shake of his head. "Hey, no, it's okay!" He assures him. "She's awake, but they needed to run some tests. We can go back in when they're done."

"A-Awake?" Nathan stills, stuttering. "She's awake?"

Billy flashes Nathan Lewis the brightest smile he can muster and he readily accepts the too tight hug Dani's father bestows upon him. "Yes, sir. She's awake."

Author's Note: As if I'd keep her away any longer. Haha. Bad news though, this story is close to wrapping up. I literally ran out of ideas so I'm going to try and tie up some loose ends.

12. Rise

Rise

*When, when the fire's at my feet again
And the vultures all start circling
They're whispering, you're out of time
But still, I rise
This is no mistake, no accident
When you think the final nail is in, think again
Don't be surprised, I will still rise*

. .

After enduring test after test and being propped up, Dani then had to endure the doctors accessing her mental wellness and whether or not she remembered what had happened to her. She was well enough to remember to lie, but even then some things were fuzzy. Mostly her time after the explosion and before she woke in the hospital.

Dani then had to do it all over again with one of her dad's coworkers since Nathan was too close to the case himself, and then a third time with one particular government official that had been a friend of Jim Hopper. Unfortunately, however, she had to lie some more and keep her powers hidden since that's what her dad and Billy did when they were questioned.

There were a lot of questions, a lot of *I can't remembers*, and a lot of the hospital staff in and out of her room that Dani didn't get the time she wanted with her dad, Billy, and Eleven. On the other hand, she did get a brace wrapped around her chest that helped alleviate some of the pain in her rib area, a small meal, and lots of water before being offered some type of medication that put her back to sleep.

The following morning, she then wakes up groggy and with an urgent need to pee. She blinks against the harsh lighting of the fluorescent light bar above the head of her bed that had been left on and then grunts in pain as she sits up to swing her feet over the side of the bed. And though she's rather agitated this early in the morning, Dani can't help but smile when she sees Nathan and Eleven both sleeping

soundly in reclining chairs by the windows of her room.

It takes a few minutes before she feels she has enough strength to stand and walk, and Dani grabs her IV stand on wheels before walking over to Eleven to gently shake her awake. The young girl jolts awake and Dani quickly shushes her when she sees Eleven's eyes widen.

"I know this is embarrassing, but I need help in the bathroom."

Eleven doesn't even bat an eye as she shoves aside her blanket. "Okay," she murmurs, smiling softly.

Dani enters the private bathroom after Eleven opens the door for her, and then sheepishly stands in front of the toilet. She's thankful she's in one of the ugly hospital gowns so she doesn't flash poor Eleven and easily slides her underwear down while still being covered. Eleven then has to grasp Dani's hands to ease her slowly down onto the toilet, and after finishing her business Dani embarrassingly has Eleven lift her back up and then turn around so she can wipe.

Eleven ends up giggling when her back is turned, followed by Dani who grunts with pain directly afterward. "Shut up. Don't make me laugh."

But the younger girl only giggles harder.

After finishing up and then washing her hands, both girls exit the bathroom. And the second they're out, Eleven turns around and hugs Dani as if her life depended on it. She returns the embrace even though her ribs are screaming in protest, eyes watering, but the tears never fall. Moments later Dani is then returning to her bed. Lifting her arm, she then beckons Eleven to join her and the younger girl wastes no time in curling up next to her sister.

"I'm happy you're home," Eleven murmurs.

"Same. Being gone, but *not gone* was weird."

Eleven angles her face upward, frowning. "Gone, but not gone?"

"Yeah. I'll explain later. Dad will want to hear and I'm sure Billy will

too."

"Okay." Eleven settles back in, silence settling over them before she says, "Billy was really mad. He tried to hide it, but we still saw."

"Did he hang around a lot?"

"Mhm. His dad is a bad man. Nathan lets him and Max stay when it gets really bad."

Dani frowns. Billy never said much about his personal life, but she picked up on some things here and there. She had just wished what she thought was going on wasn't, but apparently it was. "That's good. Dad's a good person like that."

"The best."

There's a sad note in Eleven's voice and Dani squeezes her just a little tighter, a memory from the previous night floating to the forefront of her mind. "I'm sorry about Jim. He was a good guy."

Eleven snuffles and clings tighter, but doesn't say anything. The two end up drifting off to sleep, holding each other and only waking when it's time for breakfast.

-X-

Nathan watches with a fond smile as Dani and Eleven sit up in bed, the younger of the two being dared by the oldest to try some questionable food the hospital had deemed a nutritious breakfast. So far only the juice proved good enough to drink and all three were craving something filling, but Nathan wasn't about to leave his little girl's side.

So when Billy and Max enter the room half an hour later with stacked Tupperware containers, the three hungry individuals cheer.

Billy smirks and Max laughs. "Sorry we're late. My mom wouldn't let us leave until Neil left and he took forever to do so."

"Yeah. I would have left sooner, but Susan promised a meal for you guys so I stuck around. We come bearing some scrambled eggs,

bacon, hash browns, and biscuits."

Dani tiredly grins. "You guys are literal angels."

Max hands over her containers to Nathan and she's the first to delicately hug Dani. "Glad to finally have you back," she whispers. "Billy was turning into an even being dick than before."

Max gets cuffed on the back of her head and Dani snorts as she lets the redhead go. "It's good to see you too, Max." Then looking at Billy who's now shoved his empty hands into the pockets of his jeans, Dani raises an eyebrow at him. "If I have to ask you to hug me, I'm gonna kick your ass, Hargrove."

Billy shuffles closer before leaning down and gently wrapping his arms around her, and Dani readily wraps her arms around his neck. She hugs tight, pulling him in closer and shoving her face in the side of his neck. She breathes in deeply and exhales shakily, and her eyes tear up as Billy tightens his hold on her. After what seems like the longest minute of their life, Dani and Billy let go of one another and Dani laughingly wipes her tears away with a sniffle as Billy takes a seat in the chair Eleven has slid over for him.

"Okay, so.. dish out the food, dad. I'm starving."

The trio eat as Billy and Max excuse themselves briefly, only to return to Eleven and Dani cuddling in bed and Nathan sitting in his chair to the right of her bed. Dani waves them in and as Billy takes a seat in the only other available chair, Max curls up on the foot of the hospital bed.

"So did we miss the explanations?" Max wonders.

"No. I didn't want to start unless Billy was here because I knew I'd have to go through it all over again if he wasn't."

"Okay, soo.." Max drawls, eager to know everything.

"Why did you do it?" Billy asks. "Why did you sacrifice yourself like that?"

Dani grimaces at his deadpan tone. "I.. the monster was too strong

and were no match for it," she says. "I saw the chance to give you guys a head start and I took it."

Max huffs. "It wouldn't have done us any good. Billy fought both Steve and Jonathan to get back to the mall. There was a lot of yelling before- before the mall exploded." She then trails off, gaze downcast.

"What happened after?" Nathan asks softly, taking note of the angry expression Billy wears. "Where did you go?"

"Honestly? I'm not even sure. I heard the explosion and had a few seconds to throw myself behind a counter, and then the heat was so intense until- until it wasn't." She frowns, staring at each individual to see their confused expressions. "The best I can come up with is that the shadows whisked me away. I was stuck in between or something."

"I saw you," Billy quietly admits. "Do you remember that? I heard you calling my name and then you appeared in the middle of the road. You said you wanted to come home and you- you were just gone again."

She shakes her head. "I'm sorry. I don't remember that."

Billy gives a terse nod, defeated, and sinks back into his chair with a sigh. Nathan, Eleven, and Max glance between the two sad teens, and then Nathan clears his throat. "I'm, uh, I'm gonna head home and shower, and then pick up some lunch. Let's go girls. Let Dani and Billy have a moment to themselves."

Eleven and Max are quick to hop off the bed, grinning as they follow Nathan. As Nathan passes by Billy's chair, he squeezes the boy's shoulder in sympathy before escorting the two younger girls out.

As soon as the door is shut behind them, Billy leans forward in his seat and says, "I'm so pissed at you right now, but I'm also relieved that you're back."

"I know. I'm sorry." Dani's voice cracks and she quickly wipes at the tears stinging her eyes. "But if I had to do it all over again, I'd make the same call."

"Goddammit, Dani." Billy shoves himself out of his seat and

immediately starts to pace in front of her bed. "That's not- you're not.."

"I'm fine," she says in a calm manner as her eyes follow him. "I'm home again and I'm going to be fine. I'm sorry it was a sucky situation, but I needed the kids safe. I needed *you* safe, Billy, and you were."

"Yeah," he scoffs, "at the expense of what would have been your life."

Dani's heart aches at how hurt and angry he appears to be, but as she said.. she'd do it all over again if she had to. "Come sit with me. You're making me dizzy." He scoffs and continues pacing. "*Billy.*"

Stopping, Billy turns to face her as his hands move to grip the foot of her bed. "I don't want to hurt you," he mutters.

"You won't. Now come cuddle me. I'm sleepy again, but I missed your stupid cologne."

His lips twitch, but after a moment of lingering he moves to the side of the bed. Dani scoots over, grimacing slightly in pain, and moves the blanket so Billy can sit next to her. The top half of the bed is angled upward, and as Billy reclines back Dani wastes no time in burrowing herself into his side. He huffs a small laugh, wrapping his arm around her shoulders and keeping her close. "Better?"

"Much." Her right hand is laying on his stomach and Billy reaches over with his left to tangle their fingers together. She grins against him, settling comfortably until a silver ring on his index finger catches her attention. She untangles her fingers from his, tracing what appears to be tiny waves etched into the band. "When did you get this?" Dani wonders.

Billy doesn't answer right away, but when he does she finds herself softening towards the boy she's cuddling. "It belonged to my mom. I had it hidden because if Neil saw it he'd probably take it away, but after your dad had a long talk with him he doesn't bother me as much anymore."

Dani chuckles softly. "I'm sorry your dad is an asshole, but I'm glad

my dad could help you out."

"Yeah. Me too."

Dani continues to play with his ring and fingers, and neither have anything else to say as silence envelops them. Slowly but surely her hand goes limp tangled with his and Billy smiles down at her to find her sleeping. He settles in, leaning his head atop of hers and closes his eyes.

Later, when Nathan and the girls finally reappear, all three of them stumble to a stop as they take in the scene before them.

"Oh my god. They're so cute," Max murmurs.

"So cute," Eleven agrees, smiling up at Nathan who's watching his daughter with a knowing smile.

"Come on, girls," Nathan then says. "We'll take our lunch down to the cafeteria while these two catch up on their sleep."

Max and Eleven linger to watch for a few more seconds before turning back around, and Nathan can't help but smile at the sight that's on the hospital bed. Though he's always been wary for this particular time- for when his daughter started dating- he's not that wary anymore. At least not when it comes to Billy- the boy who'd been distraught as he was when Dani went missing, though he did a lot better at hiding his emotions than Nathan did. And with one last lingering look, he sighs softly and readily accepts the fact that Billy Hargrove was going to be a permanent fixture in their lives until his daughter sent him away.

But by the way she is cuddled up to him, Nathan figures it won't be anytime soon.

Dani spends two more days in the hospital with Eleven and Max as fixated presences in her room. Nathan and Billy both had work, even though they did their best to take off, but Dani wouldn't let them. She claimed they would see each other after work and made them see reason that Nathan had bills to pay while Billy had a father to keep

off his back. They didn't like it, but Dani never had a moment alone so they were more than okay leaving her in the hands of the others. Because if Max and Eleven, plus all their little friends weren't there, then Nancy, Steve, or Robin dropped in for a brief visit. She even got a call from Joyce Byers, Jonathan, and Will, and by the time her stay was over she was more than ready to go home.

On her first day back home, Dani has to deal with a hovering father. She and Eleven eventually kick him out, and the two girls settle in front of the TV for a day of lazing about. But eventually Eleven is lured away by her boyfriend Mike, and Dani dozes on the couch.

She doesn't know how long she's been asleep until someone is continuously poking her left shoulder.

"Hey, Sleeping Beauty, wake up."

"Dustin, can you not?" Someone who sounds suspiciously like Steve sighs. "She's been through a lot."

"We brought dinner, Harrington. The least she can do is wake her ass up to eat it."

Grinning softly, Dani cracks open an eye. "God I missed your attitude, Dusty. It's so nice to see you're back to your old self." Both eyes open now, Dani sits up and nods at his companion. "Hey, Steve. Welcome to my humble abode."

He sheepishly rubs the back of his neck. "Yeah. Sorry about that. I tried to tell Dustin to knock first, but he just barged right on in."

"Don't worry about it. We're used to it. Dustin even has his own shelf in our kitchen."

Steve laughs. "Of course he does." Then glancing towards the direction Dustin disappeared to, he says, "We, uh, we brought KFC. I hope you can eat that."

"I can actually. Help me up?"

Steve gently helps Dani stand on her own two feet. Once she's settled, he asks, "How are the ribs?"

"Better. They still hurt, but only if I make sudden movements."

Dani leads the way to the kitchen, smiling fondly at how Dustin seems to know his way around already. Steve hesitantly lingers until he sees Dustin so at ease and then the three are sitting down and dishing out food.

The three are laughing and eating, and talking about what Steve's going to do now that the mall is closed down.

"Uh, nothing," he huffs. "Schools just around the corner."

"If I were you, I'd have just lounged around the pool all summer."

"And be the prime target for Hargrove? No thanks."

Dani chuckles. "Billy's not even that bad."

"Uh, what?!" Steve and Dustin scoff.

"Of course he is. Or was." Steve frowns. "You know, he was actually pretty decent after he sets his sights on you and you gave him the time of day."

"Still weird," Dustin grumbles. "You should have been with someone like Steve. Now Steve's a good guy, Dani. Totally better than Billy Hargrove."

"Ha. Ha. Shut up, man," Steve nervously muses, cheeks heating up. "Not cool."

But while Steve seems rather embarrassed, Dani finds it rather amusing. "Well now that I'm kind of with Billy, I find it safe to mention that Steve almost had a chance."

His eyes widen. "What?! When?"

"When we first met, idiot. I thought you were cute, but it just wasn't meant to be. You were constantly working and I stayed in town a majority of the time, and I just spent more time with Billy. He saw his chance and took it, and I- well I really like him."

"Way to go, dumbass." Dustin slaps Steve upside the head. "You cockblocked yourself!"

"Hey!" Dani barks, giggling. "Don't say cock. You're too young for that type of language."

Steve snorts and Dustin rolls his eyes, hiding his smile. "Whatever. If Billy steps out of line, we're kicking his ass," Dustin then says.

"Yeah, yeah."

When Nancy shows up, Dani is more than happy for some girl time where she doesn't have to censor her thoughts. She greets the Wheeler girl with a brief hug and lets her in.

"My mom sent these," Nancy says, holding a container of brownies a little higher. "She's been worried about you, but she was hesitant to visit because she's old and you're not. Her words, not mine."

"Karen?" Dani smiles, taking the brownies. "Tell her she's more than welcomed to stop by whenever. Seriously, I miss our girl talk."

"You and my mom have girl talk?" Nancy then muses, chuckling. "How did that start?"

"I'll tell you all about it, but first, are you sticking around? We can take snacks into the living room."

"Oh. Yeah. Sure." As Nancy follows Dani into the kitchen to round up some more snacks and drinks, the two then walk back to the living room where MTV is playing. "How are you holding up, by the way."

"I'm good. Just been more tired than usual and my ribs are sore, but I'm fine."

"Good. That's good."

"Yeah." Dani situates herself on the recliner while Nancy settles on the couch. "So back to your first question, I actually met your mom at the pool. I fell asleep while tanning and she woke me up in time to turn over."

Nancy smiles softly. "That sounds like her."

"I also noticed that she and the other ladies primped around a certain time, and made sure that their tits were on proper display."

"Oh no."

"Oh yes," Dani laughs. "There was one lifeguard in particular that took the ladies by storm."

"Please tell me it isn't who I think it is?"

"Billy Hargrove." Nancy grimaces and Dani waggles her eyebrows. "We bonded over ogling Billy in his swim trunks. I also might have mentioned to your mother that Billy was cute, but he seemed like a one time ride."

Nancy chokes. "You didn't!?"

"I totally did." Dani and Nancy laugh, and then both girls take a moment to take a bite out of their brownies and a sip of their Cokes. "I was so sure she was going to scold me, but she just laughed. She was there when the teasing started between Billy and I."

"That's too funny. The girls at Hawkins High are gonna be pissed you have him on lockdown, just so you know."

"Nothing's set in stone, Wheeler," Dani says, her amusement faltering. "But I guess we'll see."

"You must be joking. That boy is either already in love with you or on the verge of falling in love."

Dani can't help the blush that stains her cheeks, so she's quick to take the spotlight off of her. "Speaking of boys, how are things with you and Jonathan? I spoke to him and Will the other day. They sound great."

Nancy smiles shyly and nods, all too willing to let the subject change. "We're still good. I thought the distance would make things sizzle out, but I still very much like him."

"Good. I'm happy for you," Dani tells her honestly. They continue to snack some more, watching a bit of TV before she says, "Hey, Nance? When my car's finally fixed, do you think you'd be willing to go shopping with me? There's a mall two towns over we can hit up."

"Oh. Yeah! I'd like that."

"Thank god," Dani chuckles in relief. "I wasn't looking forward to shopping with Billy. I need a girl's opinion and I had a feeling he'd only have good things to say about the underwear portion of the trip."

Nancy laughs, cheeks rosy and eyes shiny with happiness. "Don't worry. I got you."

13. I Want You To Want Me

Author's Note: As stated in the beginning of this story, I mentioned some things were going to make an appearance in here that weren't invented in the 80's (texting, razr cell phones). I've been getting a lot of messages and I'm just over it tbh. I mention it one last time in this chapter and probably won't bring them up again since it appears to be a problem.

Also I'm wrapping this story up soon. Like.. 3 chapters left soon. I was going to try and extend it, but it seems I'm not the only one whose lost interest.

I Want You To Want Me

*I want you to want me
I need you to need me
I'd love you to love me
I'm beggin' you to beg me*

. .

The Mindflyer roars, it's face just inches from Dani's own. Her arms are splayed at her sides, pinned, and she can't move. She doesn't have the strength or energy to do so anyway.

"Dani!"

Her head lolls to the side and her bottom lip wobbles as she sees Eleven being held back by Mike. She's struggling against him, eager to get to her. "S-stop. Go!" Dani yells.

But instead of fleeing to safety, Eleven stays. And Mike. And Billy. Fear absolutely grips her. Because instead of fleeing, Eleven, Mike, and Billy linger. The Mindflyer takes notice of their presence and each are captured by a tentacle, it's sharp teeth digging into their flesh.

Dani screams as she jolts up in bed, blackness swimming across her vision. "No, no, no," she mumbles. "I'm not there anymore. I came

home. I came home," she continues to mutter, pulling her knees up to her chest, rocking back and forth. "I'm not there, I'm not there, I'm not there."

"Dani, you need to calm down. *Breathe*. I'm right here with you."

Her head snaps in direction of the voice. "Billy?"

"Yeah, sweetheart. I'm right here. You had a bad dream and the shadows are swarming you. *Protecting* you. But there's nothing to fear here, so just calm down."

Inhaling and exhaling shakily, Dani works on settling her nerves and getting herself under control. What seems like several long minutes later, the shadows start to drop and bleed back to their nooks and crannies. Then blinking her eyes open, she smiles sheepishly at Billy standing in her doorway. "Dad gone?"

"Yeah. He was gone when I got here."

She huffs. "You're really putting your own copy of our house key to use, huh?"

"If your dad didn't want me here, he'd had never given it to me."

"Yeah, yeah. Just wait until he stops hovering. He's gonna be the protective dad once more and be suspicious of your motives."

"My motives?" Billy feigns innocence. "I don't have any motives."

"So that's why your eyes haven't moved from my legs?" His gaze immediately snaps up, a smirk forming as she rolls her eyes and climbs out of bed. "Yeah that's what I thought."

Dani then walks up to Billy, wrapping her arms low around his waist and briefly hugging him. "How long have you been having these dreams?" He wonders, wrapping his arms around her shoulders to return the embrace. "And what's with the shadows? Your nose isn't bleeding and the shadows were out in full force."

"That was the first time. I've never really had a nightmare from that night before." Billy hums and she pulls out of his arms. "As for the

shadows, they come easier now. I'd always been afraid of what I could do and afraid of exploring my capabilities because I didn't want to be caught, but ever since Starcourt it's like a door's been opened. I was terrified and angry, and in order to protect everyone I knew I had to let the power flood in. And now.. now the power is just there waiting to be beckoned at a moment's notice."

To prove her point, slowly swings an arm out and watches as the shadows at her feet gather and drag across the floor to follow the motion of her arm. Then raising her arm, she smiles as the shadows lift.

"So there's that." Dani sighs and lets the shadows blend back in to where they came from. "Now go wait downstairs. I need to shower after all that. I feel gross."

"Smell it too."

She gasps as Billy laughs, the genuineness of it rather soothing to her still frayed nerves. She nudges him out of her room and quickly gathers up some clothes and a towel, and takes a cool shower to wash away the sweat from her body.

After drying off and towel drying most of her hair, Dani then dons a pair of loose, black sleep shorts, a gray cotton tee, and a pair of socks. She meets Billy downstairs, tossing herself down onto the sofa and right up next to Billy.

"So what's the plan?"

"Exactly this," Billy says. He starts flipping through the channels, winding his right arm around Dani's shoulders and pulling her flush against him. "Now that the mall's closed down, there's nothing to do."

"Not even the pool?"

"Definitely not the pool. I've been waiting for my day off, I'm not about to spend my free time there."

"Lame." Dani pokes his cheek and grins when he pinches her shoulder. "When's lunch time? I've got cash if you got gas."

"Still a few hours away. Just nap some more and I'll wake you when it's time to eat."

"Come on, Hargrove." She whines. "Do I really have the house to myself and all you wanna do is let me sleep? You've gone soft." He tenses, his gaze never leaving that of the TV. "I can't be the only one who wants to pick up from where we left off at Jim's cabin."

Billy shifts in his seat. "You're hurt."

"You're making excuses." Dani smiles sadly and angles her body towards him. "Look. If you're not into me like you were before without the danger of dying hanging over our heads, then tell me. I'm a big girl."

"Dani-"

"I can handle it. I can be civil," she says, cutting him off.

"Will you just-"

"But I won't tolerate being led on."

"Goddammit, Dani." Billy shifts and pulls Dani into his lap so she's straddling him, grabbing her face in his hands and crashing their lips together. He's doing his best to deepen what would no doubt be a mind blowing kiss, but all she can do is smile against his mouth. "What's," *kiss*, "so," *bite*, "funny?"

"Nothing," Dani muses, using the tip of her tongue to flick his top lip and then pecking his cheek. Pulling back, she practically beams down at him as her hands cup either side of his neck before sliding back so her fingers tangle in his hair. "You totally want me." And to prove her point, she grinds down in his lap and smirks when he groans.

"That's not playing fair." Billy's head falls back, eyes closed. "You're still healing. I don't want to hurt you."

"I know, but I just needed to make sure there was something still between us."

"Of course there is." His hands, which had settled on her waist, nudge

her backwards. "Scoot down some. There's something in my pocket that I was meaning to give to you before you started to seduce me."

Dani chuckles and watches as Billy reaches down into the front pocket of his jeans, grunting as he attempts to shove his hand down in there. "Need a hand?"

"Shut up."

He eventually pulls free a silver chain with a ring dangling from it. A very familiar, silver band that she remembers faintly playing with during her stay in the hospital. He watches her brow furrow before her gaze darts to his hand and his down ring-less finger. Her eyes widen as she pushes the hand holding the necklace back towards him. "No. Is that- no, Billy. That was your mom's."

"It was. And then it was mine. Now I want you to have it." He gently unclasps the chain, holding it open and smiling softly at her. "I think she'd be happy to see you in possession of it now- the girl that I.. that I like. A lot."

A lump forms in Dani's throat, she blinking rapidly to rid her eyes of the tears stinging her eyes. "A-Are you sure?"

"Yeah. I want you to have something of mine. Always. At least until you decide you don't want me anymore."

Dani slowly nods and gathers up her still damp hair so Billy can clasp the necklace around her neck. When he's done and the ring settles just atop her cleavage, she gently touches the ring before meeting his gaze once more. "I won't take it off."

"Good." Billy leans in to capture her lips once more in a kiss, but before Dani can deepen it he leans back with a smirk. "No funny business. Not until your ribs are a little bit better."

"You suck, Hargrove."

"I lick too, Princess, but you won't experience that until later."

Dani groans as she climbs off Billy's lap, he chuckling and swatting her thigh as she settles in right next to him once more. After a few

moments of silence, she asks, "So does this mean what I think it means? Are we-"

"Yes," he laughingly groans. "We are."

Dani grins and curls up against his side, content to just be for the time being. But the smell of his cologne and the feel of him under his chest seriously makes her mind go fuzzy, and she does her best to alleviate the throbbing sensation between her thighs.

It was going to be a long couple of weeks.

Tired of being cooped up in the house with itty bitty teens who constantly complain about El not being around enough, Dani finally gets the bright idea to head to the pool. It was totally because the kids were annoying her and not because her *boyfriend* was going to be on shift.

So putting on a black one-piece swimsuit, and then covering up in a crop top and jean shorts, Dani packs a bag and tosses it into the passenger seat of her newly fixed up Firebird. She shoots off a quick text to her dad to let him know where she's going to be, and then after receiving word from him to take it easy she pockets her phone and gets in her car herself.

Driving again soothes something deep in Dani's bones that she hadn't realized had been bothering her, so she cruises around town for as long as she can before parking at the pool. Then after switching out her sneakers for some flip-flops, Dani shoulders the strap of her bag and exits her car.

There's a lot of staring as she pays the entrance fee and walks alongside the pool, she keeping her head held high and smiling at the familiar faces. Billy's usual cougar club are mostly all accounted for and Dani waves at them all as she continues on down the line until she can find an empty chair. But before she can find an empty one, two young faces catch her attention.

"Steve? Why you tryin' to flex the muscles you don't have?"

From beside him, Robin laughs and shoves her sunglasses up atop her head. "Hey, Dani. Thanks for that. I needed it."

"Anytime, Buckley." Dani takes a seat on the edge of Steve's chair, smirking as he nervously crosses his arms over his bare chest. "What are you guys up to?"

"N-Nothing."

Robin rolls her eyes. "We were scoping out the girls, but Steve doesn't have as much game as he said he did."

"Hey!"

Dani grins, her mind completely glossing over what Robin said. *We were scoping out the girls.* As in both of them. As in Robin Buckley was totally into girls and she just oh so casually came out to Dani. As she meets Steve's gaze, she can see the subtle panic as his gaze darts between Robin and herself, but she merely grins and puts both of them at ease. "As if you two would score any ass with Billy back. You do know he's on shift today, right?"

Robin slowly eases back into her chair, chuckling softly as Steve groans. If she was going to completely be at ease with Robin's secret, well then they had no problem with that. "So that's why no one is paying us any attention," Steve complains. "What do girls even see in that tool?"

"Boy's got a superb ass," Dani muses. Both her friends make a noise of disgust and she pinches Steve's calf in retaliation. "If you're desperate for some action, Harrington, why don't you try out the mall two towns over?"

"You mean the one in Point Place?"

"Well yeah. Their mall is no Starcourt, but the girls are cute."

"Hmm. She may just be onto something," Robin says. "What do you say, dingus? Want to go hit up the mall?"

"Sure. Why not."

As the duo sit up and start to pack up their things, Robin asks, "Want to come, Dani?"

"Nah. I'm actually waiting on some other friends, but you two go ahead. Have fun! And I want all the juicy and embarrassing details after."

Robin smiles. "Deal. I'll call you tonight."

With their newly vacated seats, Dani spreads out her bag and towel across both of them, and then takes a seat on the third empty chair. She's only alone for a few minutes before Karen and Nancy Wheeler are making their way towards her, Dani quickly greeting them before collecting her things from the two chairs so they can sit.

"How have you been?" Karen asks. "I know Nancy's been keeping in touch, but this is the first time I've seen you."

Dani grins at her. "I'm good. All I've got are the lingering scars and pain in the ribs left from that hell week." Mrs. Wheeler and Nancy grimace.

"How many did you fracture?"

"Three," she tells her. "They hurt a lot when I first woke up, but now I'm fine. They only hurt if I sneeze or cough, or put pressure on them or move funny."

"Well I hope they heal up nice and quick. That doesn't sound too fun."

"No, Karen, it's not."

As Mrs. Wheeler mentions she's going to make a quick trip to the bathroom, Dani and Nancy stay with their belongings. "Seeing that you and my mom are friends is a lot different than hearing about it," Nancy muses as she takes her time stripping out of her outer clothes. "I almost didn't actually believe it until now."

"Your mom's a total hottie, Nance. Of course we'd be friends."

Nancy huffs a quiet laugh, shaking her head in amusement. As they continue moving around and pulling stuff out of their bags,

something catches Nancy's attention. "Nice ring," she says. "I've never seen that before." Dani automatically reaches up to grasp the chain, cheeks heating up as she smiles sheepishly. Nancy raises an eyebrow at her. "Spill. Now."

"It's, uh, it's Billy's." Both Nancy's eyebrows raise, this time in surprise. "Well it was his mother's really. I'm just holding onto it for reasons," she slowly admits.

Slowly, her friend smiles. "That's adorable."

"Shut up," she laughs.

"So are you two..?"

"Official? Yeah."

Nancy's smile softens just a tad. "As long as you're happy and he treats you right-

"He treats me just fine," Dani assures her. "I've heard the horror stories about him and told him if I ever see that behavior or if it's directed at me, he's going to be in for a major ass kicking."

"Good."

Karen Wheeler eventually rejoins them, she in her own one piece swimsuit along with Nancy who wore a bikini. Dani hesitates stripping off her own clothes because of the scarring across the top of her breasts, but gets to stall just a little bit longer when the nearby group of women start giggling and primping in a hurry.

"Umm, what's going on?" Nancy asks, taking notice of their behavior.

Karen wiggles in her seat, bending one knee and sitting in a rather seductive manner. Nancy frowns at her and Dani smothers her laughter with a hand, she then gesturing towards the employee changing room. "The show's about to start."

"What show?"

Almost as if on cue, the door bangs open and out saunters Billy.

"Hot damn."

"Oh gross," Nancy snorts.

Clad in his uniformed red shorts, whistle around his neck, and sunglasses perched on the bridge of his nose, Billy smirks at all the lingering stares and simpering older women. Karen even pushes her breasts out and sighs longingly, and Nancy groans in embarrassment.

Unable to help herself, Dani wolf whistles. Billy's smirk widens into a genuine smile and he redirects his path towards them. He greets Mrs. Wheeler, nods at Nancy, and then Dani stands just in time to receive the briefest and chastest kiss from her boyfriend.

"Mmm. Hey, handsome."

"Princess. How long have you been here?" The sunglasses come off and he hangs them alongside his whistle.

"Not long. I made plans with the Wheelers a few days ago and here we are."

"Yes you are." His head tilts to the side as he lets his gaze travel down and then back up. He sees a sliver of her black swimsuit between the waistband of her shorts and hem of her crop top. "Is this my favorite swimsuit of yours?"

Dani grins. "No. I wasn't feeling all that up to teasing. My scars are-

"Beautiful," he cuts her off, stepping a little closer to her and angling his face down towards her.

"Easy for you to say. I bet every girl thinks your scars are sexy," she says, gaze then lingering on his forearms and the left side of his ribs. She reaches up and trails her fingertips along his ribs. "I get nervous just thinking about taking off my shirt."

Billy slowly tuts and Dani glances up at him through her lashes. "Strip. You have absolutely nothing to worry about." She laughs his words off, shaking her head, but Billy's grin falls. "Strip, Lewis. *Now*."

"Oh my god. That shouldn't be so hot."

"Mom! Gross."

Both Billy and Dani grin at Mrs. Wheeler and Nancy, but soon Billy's attention is solely on Dani once more. "I will strip you myself if you don't start stripping, Dani. Shirt off. Now."

"Seriously?" She quietly whines.

"Yes." Dani's not entirely sure whether or not Billy will actually strip her, so after briefly hesitating Dani huffs and pops open the button on her jean shorts. She pushes them down her hips and lets them fall, kicking them blindly onto her chair. Then after another brief hesitant moment, Dani pulls her arms through the sleeves of her crop top before pulling that off as well. Billy's gaze drops to her cleavage and his hand raises to trace a few of her scars just visible above the top of her suit. Dani shivers. "Still so pretty."

"Shut up and get to work, Hargrove. Stop ogling the goods and keep a look out for drowning children."

"Will do." The sunglasses get placed back on, his amusement immediately vanishes, and his lifeguard persona is back for all to see.

-X-

Treading water with Nancy and Mrs. Wheeler, Dani cringes when the whistle shrilly pierces the air. "That's the fourth time within twenty minutes."

Nancy smirks, briefly dipping below the water and then resurfacing. "Well he is your boyfriend."

"Yeah he is."

"HEY! NO RUNNING. IF I HAVE TO WARN YOU AGAIN, YOU'RE OUT FOR TWO WEEKS!"

"God he's such a dick."

Mrs. Wheeler snorts. "Young love is so adorable, yet very confusing."

"It's Billy Hargrove," Nancy muses. "Would you expect anything else?"

Mrs. Wheeler frowns, Nancy looks to Dani, and Dani grins. "Long story short, Billy is the ultimate asshole."

"What? No he's not. He's such a sweet, handsome boy."

"Really, mom?"

"Well.."

Dani laughs. "It's true. He's an asshole with a capital A, but he's my asshole. I'm doing my best to keep him in line."

"Keep who in line?" Arms wrap around Dani's waist and she squeals as she's turned around in the water. "Talkin' about me, Lewis?"

"Always. What are you doing in the water, Hargrove? You're only supposed to jump in if someone's drowning."

"Exactly."

"Wha-" Billy shoves Dani under the water and she quickly resurfaces, spluttering. "You're a dick!" Mrs. Wheeler and Nancy laugh, and Dani pouts at them. "You two too."

"Oh honey, we're sorry."

"No you're not, Karen."

"No. I'm not."

"If I had known that all it took was introducing my mom to my friends to get her to loosen up this much, I'd have done it a lot sooner."

Dani scoffs. "As if you're friends with anyone as cool as me." Nancy's smile falters, but she's quick to mask it and Dani files this moment away to ask about later. "Anyway, we should go shopping soon, Nance."

"Mhm. For sure. There's bound to be a back-to-school party being thrown. I can look for an outfit."

"Perfect." Dani turns in Billy's arms, wrapping her arms around his neck. "On a scale of one to ten, how much are your ex-flings going to hate me?"

"Hmm.. a solid seven and a half."

"Awesome."

"Well you are dating the Keg King," Nancy mutters.

Billy suddenly smirks, glancing at the other brunette. "Still bitter, Wheeler?"

"Hardly."

The sound of a whistle piercing the air causes all four to swivel their heads in it's direction. Billy sighs when he sees his co-worker rushing towards a group of grappling boys. "Duty calls."

But as he's letting go of Dani, his hand drags across her butt under water. And then squeezes.

Dani yelps and Billy chuckles, winking over his shoulder as he climbs out. "I hope someone punches you in the throat."

"No you don't."

As Billy slips back into lifeguard mode, he blows his own whistle while marching off towards the fight.

"Smitten. Absolutely smitten," Nancy grins.

"As if you didn't look that way whenever Steve came around," Mrs. Wheeler chuckles. "Or Jonathan."

"Mom!"

"Only stating the facts, sweetie."

"Well while you're in the mood of teasing, please tease Mike some and tell him to cool it with the PDA. My dad's getting into protective mode over El and I'm afraid he's going to shoot flames with his eyes

at Mike now that they're being touchy-feely in front of my dad."

Nancy laughs. "Are you serious?"

"It's cute. And hilarious. He won't say anything, not until Mike's older, but you can see it in his eyes every time Mike and El get giggly with each other."

"Did he threaten Billy? Please tell me he threatened Hargrove?" Nancy pleads.

"He did. It totally didn't faze him though."

"Of course it didn't."

"Are they really that touchy-feely?" Mrs. Wheeler frowns. "I didn't know. If it's a problem-"

"It's not a problem," Dani's quick to assure her, chuckling softly. "It's just, well El's under my dad's guardianship now and she's a pretty young lady. Father instincts are weird."

"I'll talk to him," Nancy then says.

"And I'll talk to El," Dani agrees. "They're both at fault, not just one or the other." There's a moment of quiet between the three females and then Dani grimaces. "Ugh. Look at us being adults and mature and stuff. I don't like it."

"It does feel weird." Nancy giggles and then splashes Dani.

"Most definitely." She splashes her back, getting Karen as well. "Now if you two will excuse me, I'm going to go grope my boyfriend."

"And to think I was worried for you," Nancy huffs. "I should be worried for Billy. Poor kid isn't going to know what to do with you."

"Well I gotta keep that boy on his toes. Keeps things interesting."

As Dani pulls herself out of the pool and saunters towards a yelling Billy, Nancy watches her friend go with a fond shake of her head. "They really are perfect for each other, aren't they?"

"It's a bit ridiculous, to be honest," Mrs. Wheeler giggles. "But adorable."

"Adorable's not the word I'd use, but yeah. They really are something else."

14. No One Like You

Author's Note: WARNING! First time smut up ahead. It's.. terrible. Like, I'm not trying to fish for compliments or anything. It's really weird and I had no idea what the hell I was writing. I wouldn't recommend reading it, but I'm probably sure you will anyway.

No One Like You

*Babe, it wasn't easy to leave you alone
It's getting harder each time that I go
If I had the choice, I would stay
There's no one like you
I can't wait for the nights with you
I imagine the things we'll do
I just wanna be loved by you.*

..

After witnessing her dad stew in annoyance at Mike and Eleven's PDA one evening, Dani's finally had enough. She'd sent Mike home after a while, telling him not to bother coming over the following day because she was whisking Eleven away, and then told him to inform his sister that they'd be picking her up the following afternoon as well. Eleven was confused, but Dani merely mentioned it was a girl's day and she'd be picking up Max if she wanted. Eleven had smiled and agreed to have Max tag along as well.

So the following day, after receiving some cash from her dad and picking up Nancy, Dani drove to the Hargrove residence. Eleven happily rode in the back seat, giddily dancing in her seat and humming along to the music. Billy's Camaro was the only vehicle outside the residence, so Dani parked and got off to knock on the front door.

Knocking three times, she waits patiently. The door opens and an older, red headed woman answers. Immediately, Dani knows who this woman is. "Hi, Mrs. Hargrove. My name's Dani Lewis and I was wondering if Max could come with us to the mall."

Mrs. Hargrove's smile briefly falters. "Us?"

"Oh yes. My sister El and friend Nancy," she says, stepping aside and gesturing to her car parked by the curb. "I'm taking my sister school shopping and she had wanted Max to come along."

"Oh. Well that sounds fine." Turning halfway, Mrs. Hargrove calls out, "Maxine! You have a visitor!"

Seconds tick by and then, "Babe?"

Dani's eyes light up. "Hey, Billy." He stumbles forward, half asleep and completely missing his step-mother's amused grin as she steps aside. Dani then greets him with a kiss to the cheek. "Sorry. Not here for you, hot shot. I'm stealing your sister if she agrees to it."

"Dani?"

She looks around Billy's shoulder, nudging him aside. "Hey, Mad Max. Nancy, El, and I are going shopping. Wanna come with?"

Max smiles. "Uh, yeah! Is that okay, mom?"

"Of course, sweetie. Just let me get you some cash so you can have some fun."

As Mrs. Hargrove disappears, Dani's attention returns back to Billy. Quickly pushing herself up on the tips of her toes, she chastely kisses her boyfriend. "Go back to sleep, Hargrove. Don't you work the late shift tonight?"

"Mhm. Yeah. You really taking the midgets shopping?"

"Yeah. And I'm totally ambushing El with the birds and the bees talk. Looks like Max is going to have to sit through it too."

Billy chuckles softly. "Good luck." He glances behind him and not seeing Susan or Max, he quickly pulls out his wallet from the back pocket of his jeans. "I'm not sure how much cash Susan's actually got on her, so here. Make sure Max has fun and gets what she wants."

Dani takes the offered cash, cooing. "Is this your way of apologizing

for being a dick to her before?"

"Shut up."

"Jesus Christ, Hargrove, you can't just spring stuff like this on me. It makes me wanna jump you."

Billy smirks, but before he can retort Max is barreling by him and Susan is walking forward once more. "Thank you for this, Dani. I'm so glad to see Maxine has more female friends than I originally thought."

"No problem, Mrs. Hargrove. And we should have Max back before sundown, so no worries."

"That's perfectly fine, sweetie. Have fun." She glances between Dani and Billy, her grin widening before disappearing once again.

Billy sighs and leans against the door jamb. "So you're really going to be gone all day?"

"Unfortunately. I need an outfit for some party Nancy mentioned. You up for it, babe?"

"You bet your sweet ass I am."

He leans down once more, capturing Dani's lips in a kiss. She laughs and sinks into him, letting him drag her closer and then groaning when he nips her bottom lip. "No fair. I need to get going," she mutters between kisses.

"No you-"

"Hey!" Max suddenly yells. "Suck face later. We're wasting daylight here!"

Dani snorts and Billy glares over her head. "That's my cue."

"Call me later?"

"Always."

-X-

The ride to the nearest mall is a forty-five minute drive, and it's filled with sing-a-longs and laughter. Surprisingly Nancy knew her fair share of rock songs (*thank you, Jonathan*) and the girls had an easy time picking the music they listened to.

It's all fun and games, but the second Dani parks at the mall and cuts the engine, she and Nancy turn in their seats before letting the younger girls out.

"Okay. So before we waste our hard earned cash inside, we need to talk."

Max groans. "I knew it was too good to be true."

"Shut up, Red," Dani says. "This talk is more so for El, but it'd do you some good to listen to. I'm going to keep it short and sweet as to not embarrass anyone."

"Oh god. What talk?"

Nancy smirks. "The bird and the bees."

Max's eyes widen. "No. Let me out. Let me out of this car right now."

"Come on, Max," Nancy muses. "It won't be that bad."

"Yeah." Dani agrees. "I mean, it's me. I'll make this as painless as possible."

"But I already know about this stuff."

"Then just sit tight and listen because El needs to hear this whether she knows it or not." Max sighs and drops back into her seat, Nancy grins, and poor Eleven just looks confused.

"What is the birds and bees? And why is Max blushing?"

"It's the sex talk, kiddo." Given the subtle widening of her eyes and the blush heating up her own cheeks, Dani knows that Eleven at least knows that much. Inhaling deeply and then exhaling loudly, Dani clears her throat. "So you're getting older. Both of you are," Dani says and makes sure to catch each of Eleven and Max's gazes. "You both

have boyfriends and soon enough urges are going to make themselves known."

"Urges?"

"Please don't make her explain," Max mumbles, nudging Eleven to be quiet.

"And I know my dad and Max's parents will probably kill me for what I'm about to say, but I rather be truthful with you guys. Sex can be fun if you're with someone you absolutely trust, but please don't act on your urges until you're older."

"Much older," Nancy butts in. "I really don't need a niece or nephew anytime soon."

Max snorts and Eleven flushes again.

"El, I know my dad isn't your father, but his fatherly instincts are starting to kick in with you."

Her brow furrows. "What do you mean?"

"What she means is that Nathan wants to murder my little brother every time he catches you two sucking face."

Max presses her lips together to keep from laughing and Eleven refuses to meet Dani or Nancy's gazes now.

"I'm not telling you that having a boyfriend is bad, but please cool it with the kissing when my dad is around." Eleven nods and then Dani looks to Max. "And you."

"Me?"

"We are of no relation, but I am dating your brother. I hate to say it, kid, but no matter what you do or who you date, Billy will remain an asshole when it comes to your dating life. He's done slipped into that protective big brother role now. I guess life and death situations really put things into perspective for him."

"Oh great."

"Mhm. So now that that's out of the way, who's ready to get some shopping done?"

We are!" Eleven and Max say simultaneously.

"Awesome." Nancy and Dani get out, pulling their seats forward for the younger girls in the back to get out as well. And before Max can get too far, Dani asks her to hang back for a moment. "Hey, uh, here," she says while digging out the money Billy had given to her for Max.

The younger girl frowns. "I have cash. My mom gave me some."

"I know, but this is from Billy." Dani smiles at Max's sudden change in expression. "He wants you have fun, kid, and you know he's shit with words. I guess you can say this is his way of apologizing somewhat."

"You know what?" She muses, taking the money. "I think you coming into our lives was the best thing to happen to us since settling down in Hawkins."

"Aw, Max, that's the sweetest thing you've ever said to me."

"Don't push it, Lewis."

"Yes, ma'am."

-X-

The girls, younger and older, have totally different tastes in clothing so it isn't long before Dani and Max hatch a plan. Max and Nancy are the only two with wrist watches, so Dani makes them set alarms two hours from the current time to let them know when it's time to meet in the food court for a late lunch. After that, if they still had money to spend or if they hadn't found what they were looking for, they could continue shopping before it was time to head home.

Everyone is in agreement on the plan and eager to start shopping, so after telling the younger girls to be careful, Max and Eleven are quick to depart and head to a store that was vibrantly lit up with neon signs in the window.

"JC Penny's first?" Nancy wonders.

"Sure. Why not?"

Nancy and Dani shop in relative ease, Nancy being surprised with Dani's sense of fashion.

"I did not think you'd like dresses or skirts. I thought you were shorts, jeans, and a band tee type of girl."

"Keep up, Wheeler. I'm full of surprises." Both girls chuckle, checking out the tops on the nearest rack. "So what are you looking for?" Dani then asks.

"Something super casual and comfortable," Nancy distractedly answers. "I have no one to impress at this party."

"Mhm. You going with someone or flying solo?"

"Actually, Steve and Robin are going to pick me up."

Dani perks up. "That's perfect! I was wondering if they were going to go or not."

"Yeah. Robin's really not the party type at all, but Steve convinced her to go."

"Nice."

Nothing on the rack seems to catch their attention, so the girls head over to the next one to rummage through.

"So, uh, I think I need to apologize to you," Dani suddenly says.

Nancy's eyebrows furrow. "For?"

"The other day at the pool, I made a comment that seemed like it upset you. You had mentioned introducing your friends to your mom and I said that you didn't have friends as cool as me or something like that. It seemed like I hit a nerve and I'm sorry. I meant no offense."

Smiling sadly, Nancy gives a faint nod. "You didn't have to apologize, but I appreciate it. It's just- well I had a friend. Barb. She went missing the same night Will went missing, only she didn't make it out

of the Upside Down. She was our first casualty and I blamed myself for the longest time."

"Why would you do that?"

"We were at a party together. We were supposed to look out for each other, but I totally ditched her to sleep with Steve."

"Ahh. I see." The two girls fall silent then, relocating to yet another rack of clothing.

After nearly twenty minutes, Nancy easily finds an outfit consisting of a deep purple blouse and some new jeans. Dani has her try it on and then trades out her jeans for another pair that fit a little tighter. Nancy nearly refuses them, but after walking around in them for a minute, she starts to like the feel of them.

Dani is struggling to find anything worth buying, but then Nancy pulls out a top that has a devious smile spreading across her face as she wiggles it in Dani's direction.

"Yes," she groans in relief. It's a red crop top with long, flared sleeves and a jagged hemline right under her bust. "But what to pair it with."

"Hmm. A skirt, maybe?"

Dani immediately makes a beeline for the skirts, she quickly sliding one after the other on the rack until one catches her attention. It's a high waisted, black and gray plaid skirt, and after finding the same one in her size she takes it off the rack and heads for the changing rooms.

After changing into the chosen outfit, she checks herself out in the mirror and smiles. It's perfect!

"Can I see?" Nancy wonders.

Without answering, Dani shoves aside the curtain and waggles her eyebrows. "I have the perfect chunky heeled boots in my closet to go with this. What do you think?"

"What do *I* think?" Nancy huffs, laughing softly as her gaze stays

locked on one thing in particular. "What I think is that I want to know where the heck you've been hiding those legs!" Laughing, Dani gives a twirl before stopping and facing the mirror once more. "You trying to give Billy a heart attack?"

"Maybe. Or maybe something else." Their gazes meet in the reflection of the mirror and both girls crack up. After a few moments of laughing and then getting herself under control, Dani says, "That boy has been teasing me for days and refuses to have any real fun until my ribs are all healed."

Nancy grimaces. "How long until they're healed?"

"Fractured ribs can take up to two months to heal."

"Ugh. Bad luck."

"Terrible luck. But if all goes well, I'm gonna jump that boy when he least expects it."

Nancy snorts, shaking her head in amusement. "I have a feeling this party is going to be one to remember."

The night of some back-to-school party has finally arrived and Dani is more than ready to let loose. The red crop top and plaid skirt looks amazing paired with some knee high socks and black ankle boots, and she even found the time to lightly curl her hair and left it down to frame her face.

A car honks outside and Dani rushes to add the finishing touches to her makeup.

"Billy's here!" Eleven suddenly shouts, grinning when Dani can be heard stumbling down the stairs.

"Mhm. Yep. Behave. Make good choices. And don't let Nathan see you two making out!" She yells as she passes the living room.

Eleven laughs as Mike groans, but the two don't deny being up to any funny business. Apparently Nancy had the talk with her brother as well and the young couple took their words to heart rather than

refusing to listen.

As Dani opens the door, she's stopped short at Billy leaning against the door jamb. His leather jacket hangs off his shoulders, open and showing off a blood red shirt beneath that's been unbuttoned halfway down his chest. And as his gaze travels up and down his girlfriend, his lips twitch.

"Well don't you look good enough to eat."

"Same can be said for you, babe. Now come on. I need a drink and I wanna dance. Nancy should already be there."

Calling out a final goodbye over her shoulder, Dani then grabs Billy by the wrist and starts dragging him towards his car. He's lagging a little and when she turns around to huff at him about being slow, she finds that his gaze is lower than expected and directly on her ass.

"Seriously?!"

"Hey, you're the one in the skirt, sweetheart. You can't blame me for checking you out when you look this hot."

"Mhm. Sure. Now hurry up!"

-X-

Pulling up down the street from the party, Billy parks and cuts the engine. Dani wiggles excitedly in her seat, flashing him a beaming smile.

"Someone's ready to party."

"Duh. It's my time to shine, Hargrove. I literally only know four of my soon to be classmates. I need to mingle."

"Mhm. Just remember the girls of this town are nothing but cows. Don't let their flirting with me get to you."

"As long as you don't flirt back, I don't care what they do."

"Yeah?" Billy slowly smirks. "What are you gonna do if I do flirt

back?"

Dani's smile falters, but her eyes are still bright. She scoots over across the front seats, maneuvering carefully so she's straddling Billy's lap. Her smirk returns upon his gulp and she slowly lets her fingers slide into his hair by the nape of his neck. "If you flirt back," she murmurs, gripping his hair and tugging his head back so his face is angled up, "then I promise I'll flirt back with the guys." Lowering her face, she chastely kisses the left side of his mouth. "But if you're a good boy, then I'll make behaving worth your while later tonight." She kisses the other corner, letting her tongue catch his bottom lip.

"Worth my while, huh?" He asks, voice gruff.

"Definitely." She kisses him full on the mouth, letting her tongue trace the seam of his lips. But just as Billy opens up to deepen the kiss, she pulls back, flicking his tongue with her own and putting space between them as he chases her lips. Billy huffs and she grins. "Not now. Later."

And with that, she chastely kisses him once more before leaning back. Hands sliding down his chest, she gently pats him and then quickly opens his door to climb out. "You're a goddamn tease, Lewis."

"Yeah, but I'm your tease, babe." As she fixes her skirt, Billy climbs out as well and adjusts himself in his jeans. "You should have worn looser jeans. I have a feeling you're going to regret those by the night's end."

Billy grumbles some before catching her hand in his, he slotting their fingers together and leading her towards the house where all the teenagers seem to be stumbling towards.

Dani giggles as they walk up the lawn hand-in-hand, the music thumping from inside as they near the front door. Several people have already hollered about their Keg King finally showing up, but Billy ignores them all and focuses on leading Dani inside. Almost immediately the females start smiling and twirling pieces of their hair in a seductive manner, and Dani scoffs as she presses up close to Billy's side and drags his arm over her shoulders. The smiles falter before turning into scowls and Billy chuckles darkly.

"Behave."

"I am."

Val Halen is playing throughout the house and teens dancing in the main living room are compacted rather tightly. Billy and Dani skirt the makeshift dance floor, finding themselves in the kitchen where the drinks are being served.

"What do you want?" He asks.

"Nothing too strong."

He nods, pressing a quick kiss to Dani's temple before leaving her side. She watches him go, biting her lip to keep from smiling too wide when the girls immediately flock to his side. Billy's talking to a few boys, fist-bumping and high fiving them in greeting as the girls attempt to get his attention while he's being served.

"Better get used to it," someone mutters near her ear. "It's only going to get worse as the night progresses."

Dani glances over her shoulder, eyes lighting up. "Steve!" She turns and briefly hugs him, still beaming. "Where'd you leave the girls?"

He turns around, pointing at Nancy and Robin as they sit on the counter side-by-side. "They sent me to retrieve you. C'mon. Billy will spot you easily."

"You hitting on my girl, Harrington?"

Steve sighs. "Nah, man. I'm on a mission of retrieval," he says while pointing to where they're being beckoned.

Billy snickers as he passes Dani her drink, she sipping it and settling back under Billy's arm as he tugs her back into his side. "Of course you are."

"Play nice, boys. We still have a long night ahead of us." Dani pats Billy's side before slipping out from under his arm, she dodging bodies as she makes a beeline for her other friends. Ignoring all the stares and glares, Dani sidles up to Nancy's side. "Ladies. How long

have you been here?"

"Only about fifteen minutes," Robin says. "You just get in?"

"Yeah."

Nancy grins. "Have the girls started their intimidation glares yet?"

"Since the moment I walked in," Dani laughs. "Nothing I can't handle."

"Alright, well chug your drink, Dani. You're catching up before we play Quarters."

"Quarters?" Dani frowns at Robin, chugging her drink as instructed. "What's that?"

"You don't know Quarters?" Steve asks, sidling up to Robin just as Billy sidles up to Dani. "Oh we are definitely playing."

Steve rushes back to the kitchen island, clearing it off before looking around for some solo cups. Robin and Nancy hop off the counter, Nancy hooking her arm through Dani's and dragging her along. Robin opens a couple bottles of beer, filling up the four solo cups just under the halfway mark.

"So the object of the game is to bounce your quarter once on the table so it lands in the tumbler. If you miss, you miss. But if you make it, then you get to choose any other player to drink their drink," Steve explains. "A person gets disqualified when they refuse or can't drink anymore."

"Since you're a first timer," Robin muses, "why don't you take a few practice bounces just to get the hang of it? Just like this." She shows Dani how to do it and on her second shot she makes it.

Dani smiles. "Seems easy enough."

Robin hands Dani the quarter and Billy gets into position behind his girl, one hand gripping onto her waist. "You sure you know what you're doing, baby?" Dani lightly elbows him and bounces her quarter. She misses. "Too bad." Dani shoots again, misses again. Billy chuckles in her ear. "I really hope you know how to hold your

alcohol."

"Shut up."

By her sixth practice shot, Dani finally bounces the quarter into the glass tumbler. She cheers, but Steve is already staring at her as if she's easy pickings.

"If you barf in my car, you're walking home."

Dani snickers and glances over her shoulder. Lowering her voice, she says, "Why does everyone assume I'm going to suck? I was just testing the waters. Now I know who my target is." Then turning slightly, she quickly pecks his cheek before facing the game once more.

"Alright. Enough of that," Steve huffs. "Let's get this game started."

The first round has everyone but Robin missing their shot. Robin cheers, immediately choosing Nancy to drink. Rolling her eyes, Nancy gulps down her cup before having it filled once more.

Dani misses on the second round, cursing quietly as Billy chuckles. Nancy misses too, sighing dramatically, and then Robin makes it. Nancy mock glares at her, daring her to say her name again, but Robin waggles her eyebrows at Dani.

"Drink up, hot stuff."

"Yeah, yeah."

"Stop hitting on my girl, Buckley."

"Then tell your girl to stop looking so hot, Hargrove."

Steve snorts, bounces his quarter and makes it. "Yes! Drink up, Dani."

She wrinkles her nose. "I see how it is." As her cup refills, Dani inhales and exhales to steady herself, and bounces her quarter. She makes it. "Lets go, Harrington. Drink."

Steve rolls his eyes, but takes the drink nonetheless. Nancy giggles, bounces her quarter, and makes it. Her gaze is set on Robin, but at

the last second it darts to Steve. "I pick Steve."

"What?"

Robin laughs and waits for her friend to drink, she then taking her shot. Unsurprisingly, she makes it again. "Hmmm. I think I'm going to pick," she trails off, grinning. "Steve!"

"For fuck's sake, guys!"

By now a small crowd has formed, laughing as the three girls seem to be targeting the only male in the game. When her turn has passed, Dani half turns to face Billy. "You don't have to stick with me," she tells him. "I'm sure you have people you want to catch up with. I'll come find you when the game is over."

"You sure?"

"Of course."

Billy's thumb has been subconsciously rubbing her side where her skin is on display. He hums, tongue sweeping across his bottom lip before her gives her a terse nod. "Don't get trashed."

She grins at him. "I don't plan on it. I just want to play long enough to get Steve out, then I'll come find you or whatever."

"Alright. Have fun." Billy lets his hand trail down, he patting the side of her ass with a smug grin before taking his leave. "I'll be seeing you later."

Round after round, drink after drink, the three girls are laughing uproariously as Steve stares down at his cup.

He's already swaying, eyes hooded. "I hate you guys."

Dani's eyes twinkle with mirth. "Drink up, sweetie. Or forfeit."

"Pfft. As if." Steve downs his cup much to the pleasure of the cheering crowd. He smirks and then hiccups, and his mouth immediately clamps shut. The crowd quiets as his cheeks puff out and the snickering starts right before he turns and barfs into the sink.

"Yes!" Dani whoops. "Harrington's out. Now it's just the ladies."

The game continues and when it becomes obvious they're targeting Nancy, she quits. Dani and Robin go head to head, and it's neck and neck. The two girls are nowhere near wasted, but Dani feels loose and she truly doesn't want to get more than a little tipsy.

When she misses her bounce, Dani concedes. "Alright. I'm done. I promised Hargrove some fun and I need to be in my right mind for that to happen."

"Gross." Robin's nose wrinkles. "I could have gone without that explanation."

"Sorry, not sorry."

When it becomes obvious that the game is over, a new group takes over the kitchen island. The girls stumble towards the living room where the dancing is taking place, laughing and singing along to the music still playing. A lot of the dancers seem to have moved on, so it's quite easy to see across the room where Billy is on the couch and surrounded by mostly girls.

"Uh oh," Robin sing-songs, giggling afterwards.

Nancy frowns. "You aren't mad?" She asks, gaze darting between Dani and Billy.

Dani's heart momentarily aches when Billy smiles at the girl whose hand lands on his thigh, but it quickly passes. "Nah." She suddenly smiles as he grabs the girl's arm by the wrist, removing her hand from his thigh and dropping it back in her own lap. "He knows better."

Robin snorts. "Whipped! He's so whipped."

Billy settles in, left hand holding his solo cup atop his leg while his right arm goes up and across the back of the couch. The girl to his right takes it as a sign to get truly comfortable and Dani's eyes narrow dangerously.

"I know that look," Robin muses. "Girl fight. Yes."

"Dani, no." Nancy's expression is horrified, but after a split second she cracks up next to Robin.

"You girls are a mess," Dani muses, snapping out of her brief bout of jealousy. "And don't worry. I don't plan on fighting. I plan on showing these girls exactly why Billy is my boyfriend and not theirs."

Robin's eyes widen. "Oh my god, yes. Please do that."

Nancy snorts. "Careful, Robin, you're gay is showing."

Robin gapes, but then shrugs, smiling. She's done hiding who she truly is. "Don't pretend like you don't want to know what Dani has planned."

"Speaking of, where is Dani?" Nancy then asks.

The two girls look around for their suddenly missing friend, not paying attention to the sudden switch of music mid-song. There are a few complaints before the music comes back on, familiar guitar chords resonating throughout the house. The dancers on the floor cheer before they seem to part and Robin's eyes widen as Dani saunters towards her, mischief dancing in her eyes.

Nancy gulps. "Oh no."

"Oh yes."

Dani stops in front of Robin as *No One Like You* by Scorpions plays overhead. "Hi. Dance with me? I want to get under Billy's skin."

"Sounds fun."

"You guys are terrible," Nancy says. "Now go. I got to see this."

Dani grabs hold of one of Robin's hands, the other grabbing onto the hem of her skirt as she saunters to the middle of the living room while dragging Robin behind her.

*Girl, it's been a long time that we've been apart.
Much too long for a man who needs love.
I miss you since I've been away.*

Dani stops and pulls Robin up behind her as the song continues to play, her back to Robin's front as Robin's hands settle on Dani's waist. She laughs as Dani's knees then slightly bend, Dani's right hand reaching up and behind her to grab onto the back of Robin's neck. Dani's left hand then grabs onto the hem of her skirt again, she lifting it teasingly as she grinds against Robin who can't stop laughing in her ear.

*There's no one like you.
I can't wait for the nights with you.
I imagine the things we'll do.
I just wanna be loved by you.*

"Your boyfriend looks like he doesn't know whether to find this hot or kill me," Robin says.

Dani's eyes flutter open, she not having realized they slipped shut as she got lost in the music. She meets Billy's heated gaze from just several feet away and a smirk slowly forms. She winks and the girls surrounding him scowl when they realize they've lost his attention.

"Touch me."

"W-What?"

"Skin on skin. Drag the crop top up a little bit and I guarantee he'll lose it."

"If your boyfriend punches me-"

"He won't," Dani laughs. "Trust me."

Robin smiles, her hands trailing upward and slightly dipping under the crop top. She hesitates and looks up to see Billy's reaction, only he's not where he's supposed to be. He's gone.

*Girl, there are really no words strong enough
to describe all my longing for love.
I don't want my feelings restrained.
Ooh, babe, I just need you like never before-*

"Alright. That's enough." Dani is yanked from Robin's grasp and Dani

giggles as Billy possessively wraps his arms around her. "Hands off my girlfriend, Buckley."

Robin smiles in response. "Her idea, Hargrove. Maybe next time don't surround yourself with your groupies."

Dani turns in Billy's hold, her hands clasping at the back of his neck. She reaches up to kiss his cheek, mouthing the song against his skin as he slowly smirks. Robin mouths, *you're welcome*, and then skips back over to Nancy who has the biggest smile on her face.

"That wasn't very nice." Billy looks down at her, his hands on her waist sliding down and smoothing down her skirt until he's cupping her ass. He squeezes.

"Neither was that girl trying to cuddle you." She squeaks as Billy's hands lower to the back of her thighs, gripping her there and then lifting. Now with her face above him since he's carrying all her weight, Dani smiles down at him while smoothing his hair out of his face. "At least now they know you're off limits," she says while wrapping her legs around his waist.

He chuckles. "You planned this."

"Duh." She lowers her face to catch his lips in a kiss, briefly letting him lick into her mouth before pulling back. She ignores the glares and the shouted slurs against her behavior, she scratching at the back of Billy's neck and nipping his chin when he tenses in anger. "Don't even worry about it, baby. I think it's time we get out of here anyways."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. My place or yours?"

Billy blinks at her and then gulps when Dani quirks an eyebrow at him. He seems to finally understand what she wants and he quickly sets her down. "You drunk?"

"Not even close."

"Let's go. Neil's home, but I'm sure we can find someplace else."

Dani stumbles as Billy grabs her hand, tugging her urgently towards the front door. She manages to quickly wave at her friends, flashing them a thumbs up, and then giggles when Billy trips over a stepping stone in the front yard. She's still laughing as Billy pushes her against the side of his car, mouth immediately slotting against hers as his hands squeeze her hips. The kiss is urgent and hungry, and it lights a fire inside Dani's veins.

She moans when Billy bites her bottom lip, breathing heavily as his kisses and gently nips a trail along her jaw and down her neck.

"Get in the car and drive, Billy," Dani mumbles, sighing softly as he continues marking up her neck.

"Where are we going to go?" He sinks his teeth into her neck then, soothing the sting with his tongue when she hisses.

"Anywhere. Pull off somewhere secluded and I'll have the shadows hide us."

"Fine. Get in."

The couple parts long enough for Billy to unlock the driver's side door, he yanking it open and practically pushing Dani inside. She laughs as she crawls in, yelping when there's a smack to her ass, and then sits patiently in the middle of the seat as Billy gets in. Billy wastes no time in starting his car and driving away.

With one hand on the wheel, Billy's other one lands on Dani's left thigh. His fingers dig into her flesh and she squirms, letting her left hand fall onto his own thigh and trailing upwards.

He inhales sharply when Dani's hand trails over his crotch. "Don't start something you can't finish, sweetheart."

"Oh I plan on finishing. Don't you worry about that."

She's not paying attention to where Billy's driving, she too focused on teasing him and sucking marks into his own neck. She didn't know whether or not he'd like those little reminders, but surprisingly he's all for them.

The Camaro soon skids to a halt and Dani grins when she looks around to see that Billy's pulled into a rather secluded part of the woods. The engine and lights get cut, but the radio remains on to add some background noise. And instead of Billy initiating what comes next, he chuckles as Dani readily climbs onto his lap and straddles him.

"Someone's eager."

"Shut up. You wouldn't touch me for weeks. I've earned this."

Billy smiles into the next kiss, his hands on her waist as Dani takes control. Her hands are in his hair, the eager and aggressive side of her turning on Billy beyond what he thought he was capable of. His hands smooth upward, sliding beneath her crop top and pushing it up and over her breasts. Dani giggles as his mouth immediately latches onto to her cleavage and she takes that moment to lean back and pull her top off the rest of the way.

"Fuck you're so hot," he groans. "And all mine."

"All yours." She starts pushing his jacket off his shoulders, smiling as he leans forward and finishes taking it off himself. And as he's doing that, Dani starts unbuttoning his shirt and then pushes that off his shoulders as well. "And this is mine."

"Mhm. All yours."

Dani crashes her lips against his once more, breathing heavy and swiveling her hips over the prominent bulge in his jeans. He quietly curses and Dani smiles, and she presses down harder. "Fuck," she quietly groans. "I need you to hurry up and get in me." His hands immediately go to the button of his jeans, the back of his hand brushing against her clothed crotch. Dani gasps, stills momentarily, and then starts grinding even more against him. "Billy," she mewls.

"I got you, baby. I got you. Climb in the back."

Dani does as she's told, she readily pulling off her skirt, shoes, socks, and panties. Her bra stays on, because she's not about to be completely nude in a car, and then Billy is joining her in the

backseat. He pushes his jeans down to his knees, licks his hand to give his cock a few pumps, and then readily slips on a condom. Dani licks her bottom as she watches, eyes hooded and one hand gripping onto the edge of the seat while the other dives between her legs.

Billy groans as he watches her work herself into a frenzy, he pulling her onto his lap. "You sure about this?" He asks as she hovers over him, gripping the one hand that was between her legs and slowly lapping at her fingers while holding eye contact.

"*Fuckkk*. Yes."

Before Dani can reach for him to position him where she needs him, the tips of Billy's fingers are gently parting her folds. Dani gasps as his fingers rubs her clit in gentle circles and tries to grind down onto his hand, but he smooths his hand downward until two fingers enter her. Her mouth drops open at the sensation, his fingers curling inside her while his palm continues to rub over her clit.

"Not. Fair," she manages to grit out.

"I just wanted to feel you, baby. Can you blame me?"

"If you don't get in me right now, Hargrove, this will be the last time you touch."

"Bossy. I dig it." His fingers leave her and without warning he's pulling Dani onto him and filling her. Both groan aloud at the feeling and it takes Dani a little bit longer to catch her breath. "You okay?"

"You're fuckin' perfect." Billy smirks at her words, but then his head falls back when Dani lifts herself up off of him and then drops back down. She starts a slow pace, lifting and dropping, and moaning expletives as his cock drags along her walls. "Fuck. I need it faster."

"Take what you need, baby." Billy yanks down the cups of her bra, lips wrapping around one nipple and gently biting.

Dani picks up the pace, swiveling her hips every other drop down. With one hand on Billy's shoulder and the other practically scratching at the roof of his car, Dani bounces on his cock faster and faster until her thighs starts quivering. "Billy," she gasps between moans.

"I know. I'm right there with you."

Billy's hands grip her waist and he plants his feet on the floor of his car. With his leverage, he manages to thrust up once, twice, and then three times- each time earning a louder moan from Dani as she finally cums. Billy follows two thrusts later, he slowing Dani's movement as she comes down from her high.

"Tell me- tell me again why we didn't do that sooner?" He asks.

"R-Ribs." Dani says, huffing a laugh a moment later and then climbing off his lap. "Your fault. We could have been fucking this entire time if you had just believed me that my ribs didn't bother me all that much."

"Shut up." Billy makes quick work of the condom, pulling it off and tying a knot at the top. Then leaning forward, he tosses it out the window. But as he's about to sit back down, he hears a car driving nearby. "Shit, Dani. Someone's coming."

A black mist envelops the car almost immediately and Billy blinks in surprise before turning to stare at his girl. "What? I told you it comes easier now." The car passes by, slowly, and then once in the clear the shadows drop. Dani sighs. "What time is it? I don't want to go home yet."

"We still have a couple of hours before your curfew."

"Good." She fixes her bra and then reaches into the front seat for Billy's shirt as he pulls his jeans back up and buttons them. "Let's go get something to eat. I'm starving."

Billy chuckles. "I bet you are."

15. Rock You Like a Hurricane

Rock you Like a Hurricane

He's licking his lips

He's ready to win

On the hunt tonight for love at first sting

Here I am

Rock you like a hurricane

Here I am

Rock you like a hurricane

. .

To say Eleven was nervous for her first day of public school would be an understatement. She chewed on her bottom lip, chewed on her thumb nails, and even changed her outfit a couple of times. She was used to the presence of her select group of friends, but public school would be making her open up to strangers in ways she wasn't entirely sure she was ready for.

"Hey, stop that," Dani mutters, gently slapping Eleven's hand from her mouth. "You're going to be fine."

"Am I?"

"Yes. Because not only do you have Dustin's crazy butt to make other kids feel uncomfortable, but you have Max in your corner. Billy's little protégé won't let anything happen to you."

"If you say so."

"I know so. Now come with me. We need to cover up our tattoos." Eleven follows Dani into the bathroom where Dani then proceeds to dab and blend concealer over the tattoo on the young girl's arm. "Billy says we shouldn't be ashamed of our pasts, and I'm not, but I rather no one start asking why such a young girl has a tattoo. We don't need questions after we worked so hard to have normal lives."

"Agreed."

"Good. As for me, I'll be wearing a band-aid. I'm pretty sure I'll be showering after P.E and I don't want the makeup to wash off." After placing a band-aid over her own tattoo, Dani then walks back out into her room and slips on a pair of boots. "Alright, so let's go. Dad's already left for work, so your cool older sister gets to drop you off."

Eleven's lips finally twitch into a smile and she's quick to go grab her backpack from the couch. Dani lost count of how many times she told the younger girl a backpack wasn't needed on her first day, but she was too excited to care and Nathan told Dani to leave her be. Then making sure she had her own notebook and pen, Dani pockets some cash and plucks her car keys from the bowl by the front door.

Once settled in the Firebird and making sure Eleven buckles up, the engine roars to life and TNT by AC/DC blares from the speakers. Both girls flinch and the music immediately cuts off, and Dani knows how it was done when sniffing fills the silence.

"You're going to have to be careful with that," Dani says, slowly raising the volume until it's at a tolerable level. "Don't let your powers be controlled by your emotions. You're likely to be jumpy until you become used to your environment, so be careful to not let your powers lash out."

"O-Okay."

Since the middle school and high school are practically next door to one another, Dani rolls into the high school parking lot. She easily spots Billy's blue Camaro and can see her boyfriend lounging in the driver's seat- sunglasses shielding his eyes and a cigarette dangling from between his lips.

Dani revs her engine, grinning when Billy's head lolls to the side and stares in her direction. Max, who's sitting in the passenger seat of the Camaro perks up, rolling her eyes when Billy revs the Camaro's engine in return. The other students lingering around glance between the two vehicles, the girls glaring and the boys staring with appreciation.

Max is exiting the Camaro just as Dani parks and cuts her engine, and Eleven scrambles from the car to rush to the middle school with her

friend. Dani smiles when the rest of their group meets them halfway and she collects her notebook before exiting her car, locking it.

Billy's tongue swipes across his bottom lip upon Dani's presence, he immediately tucking her under his arm and kissing her temple. "Heya, Princess. Sleep good?"

"Obviously," she muses. "Ready for the day?"

"Not even close, but we gotta do what we gotta do."

"That we do."

Dani looks around the parking lot, meeting several gazes as she does so. She doesn't offer them anything, keeping her expression neutral, but the envious stares do garner a smirk which results in sneers and a dramatic flip of hair before they stomp off.

"You're going to be trouble today, aren't 'ya?" Billy wonders.

"Only if they give me reason to be trouble."

He chuckles. "Fair enough."

Billy pushes them off the Camaro, his arm slipping from her shoulders so that his hand slides into her back right jean's pocket. Dani raises her eyebrows at him. "Really?"

He squeezes her cheek through the material of her jeans. "What? You staked your claim at the party and I'm staking mine now."

"Whatever you say, hot shot. Let's just get this day over with."

With her notebook held to her chest and Billy's hand in her back pocket, Dani walks into Hawkins High with her head held high and a smirk on her lips.

- X -

Classes for Dani went exactly as expected what with being the new girl everyone wanted to know whether it was because she was new or because she had done what every girl in Hawkins had failed to do-

claim Billy Hargrove for herself.

Lunchtime was quite the affair with Tommy H. being his usual dick self. Billy had walked Dani to his usual table, but at the first sexist joke Dani was done. She rolled her eyes and tried to tune him out as best as she could, but his idiotic laugh and sexual comments were just too much for her to handle. All it took was the combination of the words of *dyke* and *Buckley*, and Billy was too slow to catch his girlfriend before her fist went flying and busted his friend's nose.

Half the cafeteria went quiet at Tommy's shout and the rest were silenced at Carol's shriek. At the shrill words of, "*Who do you think you are?!*", Dani shoved her chair back and jumped to her feet. The trays rattled by some unseen force, but the only one who took notice was Billy as everyone else was preoccupied with the impending girl fight.

"Alright. This is not happening," Billy had said, jumping to his feet and tugging Dani away. "Settle it down, Lewis," he had then murmured near her ear.

As Carol screamed some more before coddling her shitty boyfriend, Billy led Dani over to the table with Steve, Nancy, and Robin where she was welcomed with high fives and laughter.

Later, after the incident in the cafeteria, it seemed the female population got a little more hostile under Carol's command. Touching Tommy was grounds for being bullied, but unfortunately for them Dani wasn't one to take things lying down. Not anymore.

The final bell has rung and Dani's barely exited the classroom when someone knocks into her. The girl tries to play it off as an accident and even keeps Dani occupied by apologizing, but the growing circle of girls suddenly leads Dani to believe it was all a setup. Smile slowly falling, Dani mildly glares at the small crowd forming around her.

"Danielle Lewis," the apparent ring leader smiles. "Girlfriend of Billy Hargrove. What a joke," she then scoffs, angling her head towards her now giggling friends.

Steeling herself, Dani says, "Funny. Here I thought the joke was one

of Billy's ex flings being pissy because he didn't call her for round two."

The *ooing* from the gathered crowd makes the bully's smile fall. "Enjoy your time with him, new girl. He'll grow bored soon enough. You're nothing but a mere loser."

"I might be a loser, but I'm the loser fucking your precious keg king."

There's a sharp bark of laughter, almost cruel, and nearly everyone turns towards the source. Billy's leaning against the lockers not far from where Dani is, blue eyes glinting dangerously.

"Oh. Billy! I didn't see you there," the school bully tries and fails to be coy.

"Of course you didn't," he drawls. "Otherwise you wouldn't be harassing my girlfriend right in front of me. It was one lousy lay, sweetheart. You need to let it go."

Her innocent facade immediately drops. "Yeah? Well whatever. You have a small dick anyway."

Dani snorts as the girl dramatically flips her already shortly cropped hair, she stumbling as she's shoulder checked. Dani's amusement immediately falls, she then turning to allow her now narrowed gaze to follow after the girl. Head tilting, Dani subtly jerks her head in a nod and the girl Billy had previously slept with is shoved harshly from behind. The girl yelps as she's suddenly sent sprawling, her friends rushing to help her up, and then Dani finds a mass blocking her gaze.

Seeing a familiar necklace dangling in front of her vision, Dani glances up and pastes on an innocent smile. "Hey, baby."

"That was mean," he grins. "What happened to not letting these girls get the best of you?"

Her smile drops as she rolls her eyes, laughing. "It was an accident."

"Bullshit."

"Shut up and kiss me, Hargrove. I did that mostly for you anyway. She called you small." Billy's hands settle on her waist before trailing to the small of her back, both of them grinning as his hands then slide down into the back pocket of her jeans. "You're totally an ass guy."

"Can you blame me?" His hands squeeze and Dani's eyes widen as she punches his arm.

"Quit it!"

"As you wish, Princess." He leans down and quickly pecks her lips. "Let's get going."

With one hand left tucked into her back pocket, Billy then leads them down the hallway and outside into the student parking lot. As they make their way to their cars, Billy's surprised to already see Max waiting for him. Around her are all her little friends, but his attention is quickly settled on Eleven who refuses to lift her head.

"What happened to her?" He asks.

"It wasn't her fault!" Max immediately defends.

Billy's eyebrows raise in surprise and curiosity, but it's Dani who steps forward and gently raises Eleven's head. Seeing the smear of blood below her nose, she asks, "What happened?"

"I failed you," Eleven mumbles. "But she- she made me so angry!"

"Yeah. She was being really bitchy!" Dustin blurts.

"Totally," Lucas agrees, Mike eagerly nodding alongside his friend.

Billy laughs just as Dani gently taps the tip of Eleven's nose. "Chin up, little sister. We all have our mishaps."

Her eyes dart to meet Dani's gaze. "Even you?"

"Especially her," Billy muses. "Go on, kid, and ask her what happened right before we walked out here."

Dani glares over her shoulder and he winks in return, and then all the kids are staring at Dani for an answer. She sighs. "I also might have used my powers on some totally bitchy girl."

Max slowly grins. "Might have?"

"She called me a loser," Dani pouts. The kids all laugh. "So I told her that I might have been a loser, but I was the loser fucking her precious keg king." The kids all then groan with the exception of Eleven who giggles. "She also told everyone your brother had a small dick after he called her a lousy lay."

"Enough!" Max shouts, clamping her hands over her ears. "We're just kids! We don't need to know this."

"You asked." Dani smirks at all the disgusted looks, she then winking at Eleven who's all smiles now. "I don't expect you to control it right away, but just keep in mind that not everything can be resolved by using our powers."

"I will."

"Good. Now," she says, clapping her hands and looking around, "who needs a ride home?"

The first month of school passes fairly quickly.

Eleven is still struggling with the concept of homework, but with Max at her side Nathan is saved the headache from having to remember how to do middle school homework, especially since it evolved from the time he was a kid. She also seems to have settled in with the other kids her age, and it's surprisingly Dani who's having to constantly deal with bullies. Fortunately for Nathan's peace of mind, Dani's got tough skin and one hell of an intimidating boyfriend when need be.

And speaking of Dani and Billy, Nathan started letting his daughter's boyfriend spend the night in her room so long as the bedroom door remained opened little by little. He wasn't naïve enough to think they weren't up to anything, but so long as they were safe and didn't get

up to any funny business while he was in the house then he didn't want to know what they did with all their free time. So since they weren't exactly quiet when their clothes came off, Dani and Billy usually had to wait until after school when Nathan was at work and Eleven was at one of her friend's houses to really have some fun.

Today was one of those days they had the house to themselves after school, their clothing being flung around Dani's room before she was pressed up against her bedroom door and roughly fucked. She had been particularly needy and he gave her exactly what she needed- against the door, bent over the counter in front of her bathroom mirror, and then her in his lap against the headboard of her bed.

They'd spent a little under an hour teasing and fucking, and then slid back into their underwear before napping until an alarm woke them before Nathan got home.

However, neither were expecting for Eleven and Max to show up unexpectedly.

Dani and Billy are sleeping comfortably- her back to his chest and his arm draped over her waist- when the bedroom door bang opens. The couple startles awake, jerking into an upright position.

"Three inches!" Eleven shouts, she and Max cackling at their startled expressions.

Their amusement falters, however, when they see the wild look in Dani and Billy's eyes.

"Is that- is that a shadow dagger?" Max asks, incredulously.

Billy groans and falls flat on his back, and Dani unclenches her fist- the onyx looking dagger collapsing in a mist-like form before disappearing altogether. "Goddammit, guys," she grumbles, falling back into bed. "Don't do that."

"It's late and no one was answering their phone." Max shrugs. "We thought this was payback enough for that sex talk you put us through."

"And we didn't hear happy screams, so we figured it was safe."

Billy snorts and Dani cracks open one of her eyes. "Noted. Now get out."

"But-"

"Get out, you crotch goblins!" Dani waves her arm at the door, it slamming shut in their grinning faces.

Before anyone knew it, Halloween was then upon them.

It was the first year that the Lewis' could enjoy their holidays, so Nathan and Dani decided to have fun with it. Fake gravestones were planted in the yard and skeletal limbs were clawing their way out of the ground. Cobwebs were draped around bushes and all around the porch, and strobe lights were mounted in the corners of the porch roof.

"Are you positive you don't want to go to this party with me?" Billy asks as his girlfriend flutters about the kitchen.

"For the last time," Dani laughs, "no."

"This isn't some test, is it?"

"Nope. Go out and have fun. I'm gonna stay with my dad and pass out candy," Dani tells him, coming to a stop before him. "He's gonna grill burgers and dogs, and we're just- we get to do the whole normal family thing for once. The station even gave him the night off for this."

Billy faintly smiles and places his hands on her hips, dragging her closer so she's standing between his knees. "Okay."

"Okay. But if I find out any part of you was up some random skirt or shirt, I'm gonna castrate you."

He chuckles and pulls her down to sit on his knee. "There's the jealous girlfriend I was looking for."

"Mhm. You better keep that in mind when the groupies circle you tonight." Dani leans in to chastely kiss him, quickly hopping back up

and readying things once more for later that night before he can deepen it.

-X-

Sitting patiently on the bathroom counter, Dani holds still as her dad finishes up her Halloween makeup. No one really knows, but Nathan Lewis is a whiz when it comes to applying makeup, no matter if it is normal makeup or Halloween makeup.

"..and done!"

She hops off the counter and turns around to look at herself in the mirror. Nathan has made her face look skeletal to match the skin tight, black long sleeve shirt she's wearing that has the upper half of a skeleton printed on it. Her shirt is tucked into a black skater skirt and black boots adorn her feet. She's wearing black on black on black, and she feels absolutely spooky.

"I love it."

"Me too, kid. You ready for tonight?"

"Yep. Nancy's got the drinks in the ice chest, Steve cleaned the grill for you to use, and Robin set up the candy table."

"Jeez, kid," Nathan then chuckles. "What did you do? It seems like you had your friends do everything."

"Hey!" She laughs. "I helped with the candy table and then I had to help El get into costume. Nancy and Steve were all too happy to help."

"Mhmm. Don't they have a party to go to like Billy?"

"Billy's got a reputation to uphold." Dani huffs, grinning. "Steve hasn't really been the party type since Nancy broke up with him at one, Nancy was never really a party person to begin with, and Robin rather do something with a family than deal with drunk and hormonal teenagers." Nathan grins at that and she rolls her eyes. "You're loving this, aren't you? You like having a full house."

"Can you blame me? We can finally breathe, kid. We can do all these things we've always wanted to but couldn't, and I have a house full of loud mouths that I can send home at any given time when they get on my nerves."

Dani laughs. "If you say so. Now go do whatever it is you're going to do. It's almost six which means El's friends should be here any minute and I need to be outside to start passing out candy."

After re-styling her hair into a messy ponytail, Dani steps outside and strikes a few poses when Robin wolf whistles. Eleven is standing by the candy table, her red cape billowing in the cool breeze. She's the most adorable Red Riding Hood Dani's ever seen and she can't wait to see Mike dressed up as a werewolf.

Dani's passing out candy to the younger children who are out and about before the sun sets when the familiar sound of an engine revving catches her attention. She glances towards the curb where Billy's dropping off Max who's dressed as Princess Leia. When he parks and starts to get off himself, Dani's brow furrows before asking Robin to take over candy duty.

Meeting her boyfriend halfway, Dani immediately wraps her arms around his neck and kisses his cheek to keep it PG since there are children around. "Hey! What are you doing? I thought you were going to the party."

"I am, but I'm not going to wait at my house until I leave. Nice costume, by the way. Who did your makeup?"

Stepping back, Dani twirls before facing Billy once more. "My dad did it. If you ask nicely, I'm sure he'll do your face for you."

He grins. "Nah. I think I'm good."

"Fine. Well go say hello. I need to get back on candy duty. I'm already having so much fun!"

"You're ridiculous." Billy and Dani startle when music suddenly blares, everyone staring at Steve who's grimacing as he fiddles with a boombox. And once he gets the volume under control, Dani realizes

he's playing a tape that has the Michael Myers theme song on loop. "I take it back. Harrington is ridiculous."

Laughing, Dani grabs onto Billy's hand and leads him towards the candy table. "Shush. Have a kit kat or something."

There's a sudden incline in noise and Dani looks towards the source to see Mike, Dustin, and Lucas being dropped off. Mike's hair is mussed and he's wearing a red and black plaid long sleeve. It's torn in places so fake fur peeks out, and he has furry rubber gloves on with elongated claws, and torn jeans. Lucas is C-3PO and Dustin is R2-D2.

Billy scoffs. "They're not even dating and they're still matching."

Dani pinches his wrist, chuckling. "Leave them alone," she tells him. "Apparently the boys always match, but with Will gone and Mike doing the whole couple's costume with El, Max didn't want Lucas and Dustin to be too bummed out. It was nice of her to do the Star Wars theme with them."

"Whatever. I'm going to go chill with your dad."

"Kay. See me before you leave."

"Will do."

16. Falling Like the Stars

Author's Note: Hi. Hello. I'm terribly sorry for the long wait on this chapter. The only excuse I have is that I've lost all inspiration for this story seeing as my muse started to pull me back into writing Imagines. But fear not! **There are only two chapters left in this story**- all fluffy goodness!- and I plan on finishing it. Unfortunately, there's no telling how long it'll take me to crank out these last two chapters. Until then, enjoy this!

Falling Like the Stars

*And I need you to know that we're falling so fast
we're falling like the stars, falling in love.
And I'm not scared to say those words,
with you I'm safe.
We're falling like the stars, falling in love.*

. .

School is now relatively easy for Eleven, she fitting in far better than Dani at the moment. While the other kids El's age quickly learned she wasn't one to be messed with (*thank you, Max!*), Dani was continuously picked on and talked about because of her boyfriend. And while most of their taunts went in one ear and out the other, there were just some times when Billy had to quickly distract Dani to keep her from showcasing her powers when her emotions got the best of her.

So with how everything's gone so far, it's not out of the norm to see a group of girls waiting for Dani to walk out of the lunch time, cruel smiles in place.

"Thanksgiving break is coming up," Nancy says, sighing softly. "I'm so ready for it. My mom said I can go visit Jonathan if I'm the perfect daughter when my aunt and uncles come visit."

Dani chuckles. "How much do you want to bet Mike finds a way to tag along to go see Will?"

"You'd have to be an idiot to take that bet. Mike doesn't even know I'm going yet, but the moment he finds out I'm not even going to argue. I know he'll invite himself along."

As the two girls grab their trays to walk to their table together, Dani and Nancy are too invested in their conversation that they don't see trouble until it's too late. Someone walks up to Dani, upturning her tray so her food drops down the front of her shirt and jeans. Nancy gasps, a small group of girls cackle in glee, and the cafeteria erupts in gasps and then laughter.

"What.. the fuck," Dani grits out, slowly lowering the lunch tray. "What the hell is your problem?!"

The bullies are all the same, so she's never taken the time to learn any of their names. The red head smirking at her, however, is none other than Carol's best friend Nicole. "You should really watch where you're walking, clumsy," she mockingly advises. "You've seem to have made a mess of yourself."

"I'm clumsy?" Dani huffs, just as Nancy quietly tells her to walk away when she notices everyone staring. "If you'd take your nose out of Carol's cunt long enough, then maybe you'd see where *you're* walking!"

The crowd *ooh's* and Nicole's smile falls. "You're disgusting."

"And you're a bitch who can't think for herself. You're only picking on me because Tommy won't hit a girl and Carol's too soft to defend her own goddamn boyfriend, and because Billy doesn't give any of you skanks the time of day anymore!"

The following slap comes out of nowhere, followed by a punch from some random girl. Dani stumbles into Nancy who's now screaming at the girls, but Dani's anger is quick to bubble into a rage. She readjusts the empty, plastic tray in her hands before gripping it tight, she then using it to hit Nicole across the face with it as she whirls back around.

The shouting ramps up even louder, along with the chanting of *fight!*, *fight!*, *fight!*, and Dani drops the tray to grab the girl who'd punched

her by the shoulder and deliver a punch of her own. She can taste copper in her mouth, so she knows her lip is busted, and from the corner of her eye she sees Nancy being shoved harshly. But before she can defend her friend, Robin's pushing through the crowd and throwing punches herself.

"STOP THIS RIGHT NOW! YOU ARE YOUNG LADIES, SO YOU BETTER START ACTING LIKE IT!"

"DETENTION! DETENTION FOR ALL OF YOU!"

Dani's about to throw a punch, but feeling a sudden power shift and a heavy feeling in her fist has her holding back. She drops her arm, unclenches her fist, and shakes her hand out. No matter how pissed she is at these petty girls, they don't deserve to have a power that they don't understand unleashed upon them. But her sudden distraction costs her and Dani grunts when yet another fist slams against her left cheek.

"Fuck.."

"THAT IS ENOUGH!" One of the teaching staff pushes himself into the middle of the crowd, pointing out the entire guilty party. "You, you, you, you, you, you, and you- in the office. NOW!"

Panting and licking blood from the corner of her mouth, Dani glares at the four girls who are trying to defend their actions. Nancy and Robin, who are more than a little disheveled, flank Dani and gently start pulling her from the crowd.

"Come on," Robin says. "Lets go get you cleaned up."

- X-

The Principal hadn't seemed too happy with Dani's explanation of why the fight started, but Nancy's recollection of the fight has him realizing that Danielle Lewis was provoked and was not the girl to throw the first punch. But alas, violence is not the answer so everyone involved landed themselves in detention- Dani, Nancy, and Robin with a couple days less than the other girls who originally provoked the fight.

Though Dani isn't the girl who walked away with the worst injuries, she still has to spend a class period in the nurse's office to keep some ice on her cheek. And not wanting to leave their friend alone, Nancy and Robin stayed glued to her sides.

The bell rings to signify the change of class and Billy walks towards the nurse's station while ignoring the simpering girls and awestruck boys trying to tell him about the cafeteria brawl. He had been running late to lunch, unfortunately, and missed the entire thing. So by the time he went looking for his girlfriend, she was stuck in the Principal's office and the other roughed up females waiting for their turn of judgement had tried explaining how Dani was the one to attack them. He ignored them, of course, and then was run off by a few school aide's so he could get to class.

As he nears the nurse's office, Harrington is coming from the opposite end of the hall.

Steve's grin falters. "Did you see it or hear about it?"

"Heard," Billy mumbles after a brief bout of hesitation. After all, he and Harrington weren't exactly friends. They just had friends in common. "I thought that this bullshit would have passed by now."

Steve shrugs. The nurse's office door is propped open, so Billy and Steve easily spot the girls. Nancy's hair is all over the place and is sporting a couple of scratch marks on her neck and chest, Robin's got a gnarly black eye in the works, and Dani's got a split lip and an ice pack covering her left cheek.

Billy and Steve stare at them before glancing at one another, the two of them looking back out at the girls at the same time and laughing.

Dani's head immediately shoots up, her gaze narrowing on the boys. "Yeah, yeah. Laugh it up, losers."

"Jesus," Steve muses as he enters the room. He takes a seat in between Robin and Nancy, poking at Robin's injuries. "I'm going to be pissed if you girls joined a secret fight club and didn't invite us to watch." Robin punches him in the arm and he laughs some more.

Billy then sits next to Dani, squeezing her knee once he's settled. "You good?"

"Mmm? Yeah." Dani lowers the ice pack and Billy hisses quietly. "The last hit only caught me off guard because I realized my power swelled up. I felt it in my hands and when I froze to try and shake it off, someone got in a hit."

Lightly tracing his thumb under the bruise, he says, "I heard you hit someone with a lunch tray. That true?"

Robin snorts. "It was magnificent. You guys should have been there."

"Maybe next time."

Thanksgiving break is finally here and Dani is all too ready to have a week off from school. So while Nathan works, Dani keeps an eye on Eleven and does all the grocery shopping to prepare for their upcoming food comas.

Thanksgiving was one of the few holidays that Dani and Nathan did partake in while on the run, so she knows what all to get and is glad to realize she knows how to cook most of it. Thankfully, however, her dad is going to be doing all the cooking so all she has to do is lounge around and watch the Thanksgiving's Day parade on TV with her adopted sister.

Dani ends up taking Eleven shopping for flannel pajamas to do the day right and then wonders whether or not Billy is going to be able to spend some of the day with her family. Because as it turns out, the Lewis' have Thanksgiving lunch and then have take-out for dinner. Fortunately, after speaking with Billy, his step-mother is having Thanksgiving dinner at their house so her daughter and Billy are free to do what they please throughout the day so long as they get home before six.

Then the morning of, Dani is tasked with waking Eleven as Nathan starts the food prep.

Sleepily shaking the younger girl's shoulder, Dani smiles as she's

continuously shrugged off and swatted at. "Come on, sleepy head. It's time to wake up."

"But we're on vacation."

"It's Thanksgiving, El. All you have to do is wash up, brush your teeth, switch into those pretty flannels we bought for today, and watch some lame ass parade on TV with me while we wait for the food to be done."

Suddenly giggling, Eleven rolls over and stretches. "Sounds bitchin'."

"I'm sure it does. Now get up. Billy and Max should be here soon to spend the afternoon with us before they have to spend time with their own family."

Dani shuffles forward and grabs Eleven by the hand, tugging the girl up into a seated position even as she groans. Once Eleven's sitting up on her own, Dani leaves her to go grab the newest set of pajamas and then hands them over. "Chop, chop. You have fifteen minutes before the parade starts. We'll sleep on and off downstairs, so don't worry too much."

"Fine."

-X-

Billy and Max end up showing just after ten, and Nathan beams at the sight of them in nearly matching pajamas to what his daughter- er, *daughters*- are wearing. His daughter's boyfriend tries to hold onto his tough persona after kicking off his boots, but it quickly melts away when Eleven greets him at the door and drags him over to Dani.

With the turkey still needing an hour in the oven, Nathan then heads into the living room with the kids to pass some time. Max and Eleven have made themselves comfortable on several layers of blankets and pillows on the floor, and Dani's pushed Billy into the corner of the couch as she sleepily nestles into his side as the parade plays on TV.

"Really, Dani? Let the boy breathe," Nathan says, chuckling as he sits in his recliner. "Morning, Billy. Max," he then greets.

"Morning, Mr. Lewis." Max smiles over her shoulder. "The turkey smells amazing. I can't wait to eat."

"Thanks, kiddo. Shouldn't be too long now." He looks back to Billy who's faintly grinning. "How's school, son? You keeping my kid out of trouble?"

Max and Eleven snicker as Dani gasps in mock outrage. "I try my best, sir. She doesn't make it easy."

"Excuse you," Dani huffs, "but I do not start these confrontations."

"No, but you sure do finish them," Nathan mutters.

"Lunch tray," Billy coughs, then grins. "Classic."

Dani swats at him, snuggling even deeper. "Shut up."

Everyone settles in to watch the parade, quiet laughs shared as they poke fun at some of the performers on TV. Then when the turkey is nearly done, Dani joins her dad in the kitchen to prepare the green bean casserole and cornbread dressing.

There are groans of compliments once everyone starts eating, Max mumbling about squirreling away a plate because her mom isn't the best of cooks and she's going to need something to eat later that night when she tags along with Billy when he eventually sneaks away. Billy had laughed, choked on his bite of food, and then reluctantly agreed that Susan was a terrible cook. Nathan promises to save them whatever leftovers they have, but also informs them they'd most likely have take-out as well if they were tired of turkey by the end of the night.

After lunch, Nathan was too far into his food coma to care that his daughter dragged her boyfriend upstairs. Everyone was full and on the verge of falling asleep where they sat, and Nathan passed out in his recliner knowing that all his daughter and Billy would be doing for the next hour or so is sleep.

-X-

After Billy and Max change into clothes Billy's father would approve

of, the two step-siblings leave to endure their own family's Thanksgiving festivities. Eleven slinks off to her bedroom to call Mike and see if he's busy, and Dani heads into the kitchen to help her dad pack up their leftovers and get an early start on soaking the dishes.

"So I was thinking about getting some flowers for Jim," Dani says out of the blue as she fills one side of the sink with soapy water. "There's this flower shop whose owners don't really celebrate American holidays and I was thinking about getting him some white tulips."

Nathan smiles. "That sounds like a good idea, kid. You going to take El?"

"Yeah. She misses him and I never really- I didn't go and see-"

"Jim would understand you being busy," he says, cutting her off. Walking up to his now morose daughter, he wraps one arm around her shoulders and tugs her into his side while resting his chin atop her head. "Gruff man like that knows young girls like you would rather be doing anything other than talking to a headstone."

Dani elbows him. "Shush. Jim was the first good father figure El had. I should have gone to see him the second I was better."

"Don't worry about it. You're going to see him now so that's got to count for something."

"Yeah, I guess." Glancing around, Dani steps out of her father's embrace and moves to collect a few dishes to slide into the soapy water. "You going to be good here?"

"Of course. I'll hold down the fort here while you and El go visit Jim."

"Okay."

After making her way to Eleven's room where she's giggling on the phone with her own boyfriend, Dani informs her about visiting Jim's grave-site. Eleven immediately agrees to go with her right before telling Mike what she's going to do and then hangs up with him.

The two girls change into outfits that are more suited for being out in public and then bid Nathan a brief farewell. After clambering into

Dani's Firebird, Dani then drives them to the small flower shop she had mentioned earlier to her dad and buys a small bouquet of white tulips. Eleven holds the flowers in her lap on the way to the cemetery, and it's she who leads Dani to Jim Hopper's grave since Dani wasn't sure where it even was to begin with.

Jim's headstone is next to a smaller headstone which bears the name Sara Hopper, so Eleven quickly explains the story of Jim's daughter who passed away way too young because of an illness. The two girls then take a seat on the grass before Jim's headstone and Eleven lays the tulips against it. Dani heaves a sigh and Eleven awkwardly shifts as she plucks at the blades of grass beneath her, so Dani reaches forward and tugs free a single tulip from the bunch to lay it in front of Sara's own headstone. Eleven smiles fondly at that.

Pulling her knees to her chest and then crossing her ankles, Dani wraps her arms around her legs as she stares at Jim's name forever etched in stone. "Hey, Hopper." She can feel Eleven tense beside her, but she keeps on as if she were alone and had no audience. "Sorry I haven't stopped by sooner, but I- well I honestly don't have a good excuse as to why I haven't come before now."

"She's lying. We lost her for a while," Eleven mumbles before leaning against Dani's shoulder. "But then she came back to us. I wished you'd have come back to us."

A lump forms in Dani's throat and tears sting her eyes at Eleven's wistfulness, and she clears her throat before she starts talking again. "You'd be glad to know things have settled down here in Hawkins and we- we get to lead normal lives now. Eleven's in school and still dating that Wheeler kid you kept giving the stink eye to." Eleven huffs a quiet laugh and Dani faintly grins. "Dad's yet to chase him off, but no worries! Billy is one PDA moment away from kidnapping Mike and giving him a stern talking to."

Eleven groans. "Please don't."

"Then stop playing tonsil hockey with your boyfriend in front of us." Slinging one arm around Eleven's shoulders, Dani brings her in close and keeps her there. She stares at the headstone some more, exhaling softly. "I'm sorry we couldn't save you. Wherever you are, I hope

you're at peace, sir. You deserve at least that much after all the crazy you had to deal with."

Dani glances around the quiet cemetery to make sure no one else has come to visit while she was distracted, and when she sees no one else around she releases Eleven and shifts so she can pull her legs beneath her. Reaching forward, she then places her right cupped hand- palm down- in front of Jim's headstone. Then closing her eyes, Dani concentrates on pulling at the shadows from all the nooks and crannies of the still sunlit cemetery.

Eleven watches as Dani's hand is suddenly shrouded in shadows and then frowns when Dani's nose starts to bleed.

"Stop," Eleven murmurs. "You're bleeding." Dani's eyes fly open and she immediately wipes her nose with the back of her hand. "You haven't done that in a while."

"I'm fine. I just had to pull extra hard since there's still so much sun out." When Dani lifts her hand from the grass, Eleven smiles at the black crystal-like rose that's left behind. It glitters under the sun and Dani looks rather proud of her creation. "It's not much, Hopper, but I hope you like it. And that no one steals it."

There's not much else to say, but the girls remain all the same. Eleven loops her arm through Dani's and rests against her shoulder once more, and the two just bask in the certain quietness that can only be found in a cemetery.

It isn't very long until the sun starts to really set and only then do the girls bid Jim a farewell before heading home.

By the time Christmas break has come around, it's become clear to the population of Hawkins High that Billy Hargrove has settled down with Dani Lewis. Carol and Nicole are the only two who still have a problem with Dani, but unfortunately for them their little clique of bullies have realized that Dani is not one to be messed with so they don't back the girls as they once did. And since they don't have back-up, Nicole and Carol leave Dani alone. For now.

Sitting in the bleachers during their lunch break, Dani fiddles with the ring on her necklace as she leans back into the V of Billy's parted thighs. He's smoking above her as the rest of their friends sit a few bleachers below them talking and laughing.

"So what's everyone doing for Christmas?" Nancy asks.

"I'm spending it with some family in Georgia," Robin says. "But we'll be back in time for New Year's."

"Mom and Dad are going to be in, and are throwing some fancy Christmas dinner. Unfortunately it's mandatory attendance for all Harrington's." Steve frowns and Billy chuckles at his new friend's misfortune.

"We got family coming in," Nancy says, "so that should be fun."

All eyes then turn on Dani and Billy, and she shrugs. "We don't really do anything on Christmas Day. We celebrate on Christmas Eve. Always have," she says.

"Billy?"

"Christmas Eve will be spent at Dani's, and then Christmas Day with Susan and Neil. He's inviting some old war buddies and we have to put on the act that we're one big happy family."

Steve sighs. "That sucks, man."

"Yeah."

The warning bell rings and the group starts collecting their trash.

On the way down the bleachers, hand in hand, Dani tugs on Billy to grab his attention. "By the way, Christmas Eve is basically another Thanksgiving with the addition of gift giving. Bring two sets of clothes- one set that you wouldn't mind taking a group photo in and the other pajamas."

Billy sighs with relief. "You have no idea how happy I am to hear that. Your dad's cooking is the best."

Dani laughs and hops off the last bleacher. "Yeah, yeah. Bring Max. Dad got her a couple of gifts too."

"Will do."

Christmas Eve dawns bright and early, but only Dani and Eleven are permitted to sleep in while Nathan heads in for a few hours of work. Dani manages to wrap a few last minute gifts for Eleven's friends to be delivered after lunchtime, and manages to set out the gifts Eleven had received from the Byers' through the mail.

Billy and Max show up just after ten, and it goes to show how often they're over when Max just barges right on in. Billy shouts after her, calling her a crotch goblin with no manners, and it takes everything in Dani to not laugh at her offended expression.

In one hand, Billy has a bag with a few gifts poking out that he holds out towards Dani. "Our gifts to you," he says. "Susan even got something for your dad since he feeds us half the time."

"She didn't have to." Dani takes the bag while leaning up on the tips of her toes to press a quick kiss to his lips. "Mmm. Please tell me you have extra clothes in your car? If I have to wear a dress for pictures later tonight, you're dressing up too."

He grins. "There's a bag in my backseat. Max even brought a few outfits because she wants to see what El's wearing."

"That's fine. What do you say to taking the girls out for lunch? Dad will be home later so we have a lot of time to kill before we have to dress up."

"That sounds good, but afterwards we're taking a nap up in your room."

"Deal."

-X-

Lunch with two young teenage girls is a rather loud affair. Billy seems a bit out of his element, but Dani soaks it all up and only starts

to shush them when they garner looks from the wait staff. It seems like every student from Hawkins High is out and about, but Billy and Dani pay them or their queer looks no mind.

When they get back to Dani and Eleven's house, everyone's more than ready to get into the cool house and under toasty blankets. Eleven and Max immediately sprawl on the sofa and recliner, and Dani pulls Billy up to her room.

"Be safe!" Max shouts.

Dani squeaks and misses a stair, and Billy laughs as he steadies her. "Not cool, Maxine!" She shouts back. "And you," she glances over her shoulder, nudging Billy, "shut up. You laughing is only egging them on."

They soon make it to Dani's room- she stepping out of her jeans whereas Billy completely strips down to his boxers before they both crawl into her bed. She then reaches over to set her alarm for an hour before her dad's set to be home and then Billy's quick to tug her down into his side before they both drift off on full stomachs.

When the alarm finally blares and all four occupants are woken, Dani instructs everyone to start getting dressed in their clothes for pictures. And with how Billy is about his hair, and everyone suddenly needing the bathroom at the same time, it takes them nearly the whole hour to be ready.

Nathan soon arrives, chuckling at Billy who's lounging in the living room with a rather put out expression on his face. "Girls getting ready?"

"Yeah." Billy mutes the TV before standing up and walking towards Dani's dad. "Max kicked me out. Told me I couldn't see the finished product until it was picture time."

"Always liked that kid." Billy huffs a laugh and then Nathan gestures up the stairs. "I'm gonna go get ready myself. I'll be right back."

As Billy finds himself drawn to the Christmas tree and it's twinkling lights, Nathan's voice floats down the stairs, followed by Dani's voice,

and he finds himself turning when he hears the clicking of heels get louder. When Dani then appears at the bottom of the staircase, Billy seems to inhale in surprise and hold his breath at the sight of his girlfriend.

Outfitted in a dress with the black, long sleeve top fitting like a second a second skin and a Santa Claus printed skirt flaring out to stop just above her knees, Dani grins at the sight of her dumbstruck boyfriend just staring at her. "See something you like, Hargrove?"

He gulps, especially when he realizes his mother's ring still dangling around her neck and sticking out against the black of her top. "Always." The muscles in his arms twitch and Dani's eyes are drawn to it. Billy's in a blue button down tucked into a pair of blue jeans, and it makes her mouth water. And if his sudden smirk is anything to go by, Billy knows exactly what he's doing to his girlfriend. "See something you like, princess?"

"Hardly."

Billy scoffs and then welcomes a giggling Dani in his arms, the two of them sharing a brief kiss. He hums against her mouth. "You're beautiful."

"You think so?" She asks, self consciously smoothing down the skirt of her dress. "I'm not too fond of the outfit."

Grabbing up her hands within his, Billy steps back and raises her left hand to his mouth to kiss her knuckles. He glances down at the skirt, grinning. "Ho, ho, ho."

She snorts and lightly shoves at him. "You're an idiot." Then, "Are you ready to be blinded by the light?"

Before he can answer, the click and flash of camera catches them off guard. Nathan is standing just a few feet away, camera in hand and two beaming girls flanking him. Everyone is well put together and Billy is just grateful they only have to appear like civilized human beings for a few minutes before they can change back into their more comfortable clothes.

"Aright, kiddos, everyone in front of the tree," Nathan says. "Everyone together, and then I want individual shots of Dani and El, and then Billy and Max."

All four groan but quickly plaster on smiles when Nathan raises the camera, they breaking and laughing at how in sync they all were. Nathan snaps pic after pic of them laughing and then posing as instructed. Then having passed over the camera, Billy took pictures of Nathan, Dani, and Eleven, and it took great effort for Nathan to get a single photo of all of them together.

With pictures then out of the way, everyone changed into their sleepwear while Nathan left to pick up some burgers and fries. So while Max and Eleven are chomping at the bit to start opening presents, Dani curls into Billy's side on the sofa while staring at the twinkling Christmas tree.

With his arm wrapped around her shoulders and his thumb rubbing up and down her bare bicep, Dani can't help but let her mind wander. Billy's her first serious boyfriend and while she first thought things with Billy wouldn't have gotten this serious, she's glad they are. After everything they've been through together, she can't picture being with someone who didn't know her like Billy now does.

Billy shifts and hums in content, he drawing Dani even closer and letting his cheek rest atop her head.

"I love you." The words not only surprise her, but they surprise Billy as well. He tenses under her and his thumb ceases all movement. Dani gulps, but let's her mouth continue to spew her thoughts as she keeps her gaze on the tree. "I'm not- I didn't say it in hopes of you saying it back, I'm saying it because it's true and it's been on my mind for quite some time now and right now felt like the perfect time to say it."

"Dani," he sighs. She mentally cringes and her throat immediately feels tight, but she's going to hear him out before jumping to conclusions even though her mind is already whirling with words of rejection. "I'm not great with words or my emotions," he starts, hesitating briefly, "but I like you. A lot. I just- I don't think I'm ready to-"

Somewhat relieved, Dani pulls away in order to look at him. She smiles softly. "I know. Like I said, I didn't say it in hopes of you saying it back. I just wanted you to know where I stand. I am in love with you, Billy Hargrove, and you're stuck with me for as long as you'll have me."

Something in Billy's eyes shine as he flashes her one of his more genuine smiles. He captures her lips in a kiss before pulling back and planting another one on her forehead. "One day, Lewis. One day I'll say it back."

"I'll be looking forward to it."